

# **The Keepers of the Night**



**Part 2 - Eddystone and Bideford Bar  
Bull Point and North Foreland**

by Clifford Trethewey

## Family KNOTT - George & Catherine

### An Introduction

Although the story of George and Catherine has already begun in Volume 1, this volume resumes with the story of their 'adventures' after their departure from the South Foreland Light at St Margaret's at Cliffe in Kent. The Institution of the Trinity House (Deptford) is too complicated to explain in this small piece, but it is important to understand how its hierarchy functioned and how it dictated the lives of those men who loved the job of keeping the light around our coasts.

The responsibilities of the Trinity House were created in an Act of Parliament of 1836 and it was very shortly after 1840 that their presence was felt at South Foreland. Yet it obviously took time for the strict hierarchy I will describe to evolve and during any evolving process there are situations that do not quite fit.

The task of Trinity House was totally committed to the safety of mariners at sea and inevitably it attracted men who had known the dangers that were being faced. It is not surprising, therefore, to find a strong 'naval' discipline. There was structure and order in the daily lives of the keepers that had to be encouraged and inspected. A Trinity House keeper was carefully 'selected.' He had to be loyal and methodical and not afraid of long hours of tedium. He was given a uniform, as he was an 'official in authority,' but above all he was placed in a hierarchy each with its own seniority. Nothing happened to anyone who was not in the right place on that seniority list.

First came the **Supernumerary Assistant Keeper**. This prefix was commonplace in the Victorian Royal Navy and it usually meant that this was someone not yet being employed at the required level. In other words he was the 'new boy' and as such he had to do anything and to go anywhere that he was instructed so to do. He was an 'apprentice' or as some might say 'a journeyman.' He might stay on a light for only a few days, never more than a month or two and he had to keep this up all around the coast of England and Wales for about three years. After that time he was considered to be 'suitable' and promoted to Assistant Keeper.

The **Assistant Keeper** was appointed to a 'permanent' station and could expect to be there for 3 to 5 years. He usually worked with another Assistant Keeper and it was then that the men could think about getting married and raising families, but it would be 15 years or 3 to 5 stations, before he would be considered for promotion one more time.

The **Principal Keeper** was responsible for the light station. He was the one who would be castigated if any inspection of the light attracted adverse comment. He was the 'team leader' and it goes without saying that it was important not only for the men to get along well together, but their families too, as the living accommodation was rarely 'detached.' However there was one anomaly in all of this – a rock light. One that was isolated miles out to sea, where the conditions were harsh and relief was sometimes impossible. No family man would volunteer for that job. They had to be sent! It became traditional that the **FIRST** appointment for a new Principal Keeper was a rock light. There were no exceptions, but once it had been completed he was never required to do it again.

On a family light when they were privately owned, father was the 'Principal Keeper' and his son (not necessarily his eldest son) was his 'Assistant Keeper' and it stayed that way until father died and the son could take on his role and hand to his own son the title of 'Assistant Keeper.' All that had changed. Trinity House was now in charge of all lighthouses and no longer could a family expect to 'keep it in the family' as the Knott's had done since 1730.

Yet South Foreland was **TWO** lights – Upper and Lower Lights – **AND** it attracted attention for considerable technical experimentation. In 1851 Henry had charge of three other keepers – two of them were his younger sons but within days, one of them, John, was dead. In 1861 George, was still there at the age of 32. Something had to give. It was time for George to be promoted to Principal Keeper and that meant only one thing – a move to a rock lighthouse and Trinity House had selected the most famous rock lighthouse in the world – Smeaton's **EDDYSTONE ROCK!**

# KNOTT

## THE FOURTH GENERATION OF LIGHTKEEPERS

# Chart 4

Derived 10-07-2006  
Revision 4  
23-01-2021

**GEORGE**  
Bn 23 Nov 1828  
St.Margaret's at Cliffe  
  
Died 27 Jan 1904 (75)  
Dover

Catherine  
**GOLDSACK**  
Bn 15 Oct 1827  
St. Margaret's at Cliffe  
Died 30 Aug 1910 (82)  
Dover

Married 19 July 1849  
St. Margaret's at Cliffe

**HENRY THOMAS**  
Bn 9 Aug 1851  
St. M @ Cliffe  
Died 24 Jul 1910 (58)  
Crewe

Ellen Margaret  
**HALL**  
Bn 21 Feb 1847  
Milford  
Died Jan 1886 (39)  
Holyhead

**GEORGE JOHN**  
Bn 25 Feb 1855  
St. M @ Cliffe  
Died 1941/2Q (86)  
Barnstaple

Georgina  
**SKINNER**  
Bn 1856/1Q  
Appledore  
Died 1932/2Q (76)  
Barnstaple

**ARTHUR WILLIAM**  
Bn 2 Mar 1857  
St. M @ Cliffe  
Died 7 Mar 1924 (67)  
Mutford

Dorothy Vown  
**TUCKER**  
Bn 1853/4Q  
Appledore  
Died 1937/2Q (81)  
Bournemouth?

Ann  
Bn 3 May 1850  
St. M @ Cliffe  
  
Died 3 Sept 1851  
St. M @ Cliffe

Married 2 Dec 1877  
St. Seiriol's HOLYHEAD

5 children 1878-86  
See CHART

Matilda  
Elizabeth  
Bn 23 Mar 1853  
St. M @ Cliffe  
Died 24 Oct 1863  
Plymouth

Married 17 July 1876  
APPLEDORE

3 Children 1876-92

Married 1879/3Q Bideford  
Exact date/place unknown

2 children 1882 & 90

**FREDERICK WARNER**  
Bn 20 Apr 1859  
St. M @ Cliffe  
Died 22 Mar 1940 (80)  
Braunton

Ellen  
**HILL**  
Bn 14 Nov 1857  
Devonport  
Died 30 Sep 1945 (87)  
Barnstaple

Married 15 February 1883  
St. Mary's Church, BIDEFORD

5 children 1884-1900  
See CHART 5

Charles  
**SMITH**  
Bc 1828  
Biddenden, Kent  
Died 1921/1Q (93)  
Cranbrook

Ann Dixon  
Bn 26 Mar 1861  
St. M @ Cliffe

Married 1894/2Q Dover  
Exact date & place unknown

5 children 1895-1903

Mary Jane  
Bn 2 Mar 1864  
Plymouth  
Died 1938/3Q (74)  
Lothingland  
Suffolk

William Robert  
**PILGRIM**  
Bn 2 Dec 1873  
Cambridge  
Died 1952/1Q (78)  
Lothingland

Married 1897/3Q Dover  
Exact date & place unknown

NO CHILDREN

**HERBERT JOSEPH**  
Bn 6 June 1866  
Braunton  
Died 10 Apr 1937 (70)  
Exeter Hospital

Dinah  
**HEAL**  
Bn 1859/3Q  
Barnstaple  
Died 15 Jul 1938 (78)  
Barnstaple

Married 8 July 1889  
Baptist Chapel, BARNSTAPLE

3 children 1892-96

Unmarried

Rose Ellen  
Bn 10 May 1868  
Braunton  
Died 7 Sep 1915 (47)  
Dover

**WALTER GOLDSACK**  
Bn 21 Jan 1870  
Braunton  
Died Aug 1945 (75)  
Maidstone ?

Emma Amelia  
**HOLMES**  
Bn 21 Sep 1869  
Bermondsey  
Died 1953/4Q (85)  
Dover District

Married 31 December 1901  
Charlton Parish Church, DOVER

1 child 1904

**EDMOND HORTON**  
Bn 14 Mar 1872  
Braunton  
Died 1943/2Q (71)  
Bedford

Alice  
**GOODWIN**  
Bn 1866/4Q  
Caddington, Beds  
Died 1926/4Q (60)  
Bedford

Married 1895/4Q Luton  
Exact date/place uncertain

3 children (twins?) 1898-1902

Married 1904/3Q Dover  
Exact date/place unknown

8 children 1908-23

Florence  
Matilda  
Bn 7 Apr 1875  
Braunton  
Died 1962/4Q (87)  
Dover District

John Hamilton  
**CLARK**  
Bn 27 Mar 1877  
Dover  
Died 1956/2Q (79)  
Dover District

Notes - **Henry** (1851) remarried at a Wesleyan Methodist Chapel in Crewe on 28<sup>th</sup> December 1891. His new wife was Sarah Jane **MAY** born 1853 and died 1927. It was a working arrangement only..

Georgina **SKINNER** died as **Georgiana KNOTT** Mutford and Lothingland Districts in Suffolk are both linked with Lowestoft

# Farewell to South Foreland

George and Catherine stood staring silently at each other across the flag-stoned kitchen floor of the South Foreland Lighthouse. On the scrubbed kitchen table between them, lay a letter. Instinctively they knew what it contained, but neither of them wanted to read the words beautifully scripted on the stiff, buff-coloured paper. It was from Trinity House in London. Catherine broke the tense silence.

*Come on then. Are you goin' to open it or shall I?*

George glanced at his wife and picked up the letter. He slit its seal with his pocket knife and carefully unfolded it. Forcing himself to look at the writing, he read it unseeingly until he reached the phrase - *the Eddystone Lighthouse, Plymouth.*

He looked into his wife's eyes, without saying a word.

*Speak man. What does it say?* Catherine demanded.

*I have been appointed to the Eddystone Lighthouse and we will have to go to Plymouth to live,* George replied.

Catherine sank into the chair beside the kitchen range. *And exactly how are we going to get there and **where** are we going to live?* She muttered almost to herself.

It was so unusual for the lighthouse to receive a letter that Hammond Upton the village postmaster<sup>1</sup> had left his shoemaker's last and brought the official looking letter along the track just as soon as he had received it from Dover. Inevitably his arrival did not go unnoticed and soon everyone else on the light was bursting with curiosity.

It was George's fellow Assistant Keeper John Griffiths who gently pushed the kitchen door open and eased himself into the room followed by his wife Sarah. They were just a little younger than George and Catherine, but unlike them they had only just had their first child. Fitzgerald was just a month older than Catherine's little Ann, but Ann was fifth in a line of children that reached 10 years of age.

After studying the faces of George and Catherine for a few moments, John could not contain himself any longer. *Well, what have they said? Hammond told us who had sent the letter! It's no secret.*

When George silently passed John the letter, his colleague could not believe his eyes. *Well would you believe it? You've been sent to the Eddystone. It's almost as if they sent me 'ere to butter you up. Now you'll have to believe me about the kite-fishing.*

Sarah squatted beside Catherine and put an arm around her shoulders. *But the children,* she said. *What will you do with the children? We'll all go,* Catherine said rising from the chair and pulling the wrinkles out of her apron. *We'll all go **TOGETHER!*** Her voice was steady and determined. Catherine had made up her mind. If her husband was to be the Principal Keeper on the most famous lighthouse in the world, then she would be there to support him.

It had only been twenty minutes since Hammond Upton had been spotted coming up the track to the lighthouse, but it seemed like a lifetime to George. All the family were now gathered in the kitchen to share in this momentous occasion. George's father Henry realised that the Knott family tenure of the South Foreland Light was over and he was lost for words.

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<sup>1</sup> 1861 Census RG09/547 Folio 62 Page 32

# Plymouth and the Superintendent of Lights

After the initial shock of the appointment contained within the letter had passed and all the curious faces had disappeared, George was able to sit at the kitchen table and study the letter more carefully. He was relieved to find that it included the address of a lodging house near the Great Western Railway terminus at Millbay in Plymouth where he and his family could stay when they arrived in the town. There was also a piece of paper that would allow him to travel on the train with his family free of any charge. The letter stated a date on which he should present himself at the Custom House, where he was to meet Mr. Thomas Edward Ditcham, the Trinity House Agent and Superintendent of Lights in the South West, who would repay any expenses that George had incurred during his journey.

George found the Custom House on the Barbican quite easily, but he was a little apprehensive about stepping inside. Thomas Ditcham was sitting erect behind a huge desk and he must have been twice George's age and looked very severe, yet, there was just a hint of warmth in his voice as he congratulated George on his first appointment as a Principal Light Keeper. He went on to emphasise that any problem that George might encounter, either with the light or its keepers, should be referred to him.



The New Custom House (left) and the *Three Crowns* (right) on the Parade

George had already decided that it was best to sit and listen attentively and avoid saying anything, when Mr. Ditcham stated that he had secured a cottage for the Knott family whilst enquiring about their present well-being. George's relief overwhelmed him and he stammered out his gratitude on behalf of Catherine and himself.

Trying to put George at his ease, Ditcham interrupted him by saying, *I know that you and your family have grown up on the South Foreland Light, but Eddystone is different – VERY different. I'm afraid for the foreseeable future you will just have to make the best of it until we can bring you ashore to a land station at the end of your time on the rock.*

He then went on to explain how difficult it was to reach Eddystone unless the wind was in the right quarter. Tours of duty were imprecise and he continued, *it is not always possible to go out on a set day nor return on a set day and wives must understand and accept that situation.*

The weather that was needed to sail out to the reef, together with the state of the tide at the reef, made the timing of the passage difficult to predict and very demanding in its execution. The wind was most suitable anywhere from the west, through north to east, but any wind from a southerly direction was against a passage out. Ditcham concluded by saying that the relief of the lighthouse was due to take place in week's time, so he suggested that George gather up his family and install them in their new cottage and see the children settled at school.

Thomas Ditcham suddenly stood up, pushed his chair back quite untidily and extended his hand towards George. *You will receive a message from me within seven days. If one does not come, then report back here to see me,* and with that, the interview was ended.

George strode across the cobbled quays to tell Catherine the good news. They had a house!

## Plymouth and a Place to Live

Even before I took on the task of Family Historian in 1979, the Knott Family always gave the impression that they knew that one of George's children – the middle child Mary Jane – had not been born in a lighthouse, but in Plymouth.

This event was always assumed to have coincided with George's time on the Eddystone, but no written evidence existed that would confirm this part of George's career. It was all part of the family folklore.

The first seven children born to George and Catherine were all born at the South Foreland Light in Kent and their last five children were all born at the Bideford Bar Light near Braunton in North Devon, but no one ever seemed to ask the question – *where exactly in Plymouth was Mary Jane born?*

Making the assumption that someone else knew the answer, was a mistake. As I trawled through Plymouth's church registers I assumed that I would eventually encounter Mary Jane's baptism, but I didn't. The custom of baptising their children ceased when they left South Foreland.

A further assumption that was misleading was that the lighthouse keepers for the Eddystone lived in Trinity House accommodation. The most likely place was Penlee Point, just beyond Cawsand in Cornwall, where there was a Fog Signal and Coastguard Station with a large number of houses. This was the case found at most other light stations, but not so in Plymouth.

My brother Ken had been involved in the research in the late 1960's and he had recorded that not only had Mary Jane been born in Plymouth in 1864 (and he had an exact date), but also that George and Catherine's third child, Matilda, had died in Plymouth in 1863 (also with an exact date), so there was only one obvious solution.

It was 2003 before I finally sent for the certificates of these two events from the General Registrar's Office. They provided the information that was long overdue. At last I had the evidence that George was a keeper on the Eddystone Light. He did not, however, claim to be the Principal Keeper, which I still maintain was his rank, but it did include that important address of the Knott Family in Plymouth. So where was it?

**2 ALMA COTTAGES** was their home, but the next vital question was – Did it exist in 2003?

I had driven past them hundreds of times and never really noticed them, yet there they were, five cottages in remarkably good condition and probably better than that found in 1862. One had a hideous porch over the front door, but two of the remaining four probably retained the original curved front door lintel. All the cottages had replaced their windows, but it was probably only the end cottage (No.1) that resembled the style that might have been there before. The big surprise was that they were back-to-back with five more cottages behind them and completely hidden from view. The cobbled lane (actually local granite setts) and the very high wall were almost certainly original and in 1891 this was the perimeter wall of the Sutton Ropery. The map also suggests that these cottages were larger and that is visible in the photograph, but it also shows six cottages and not five

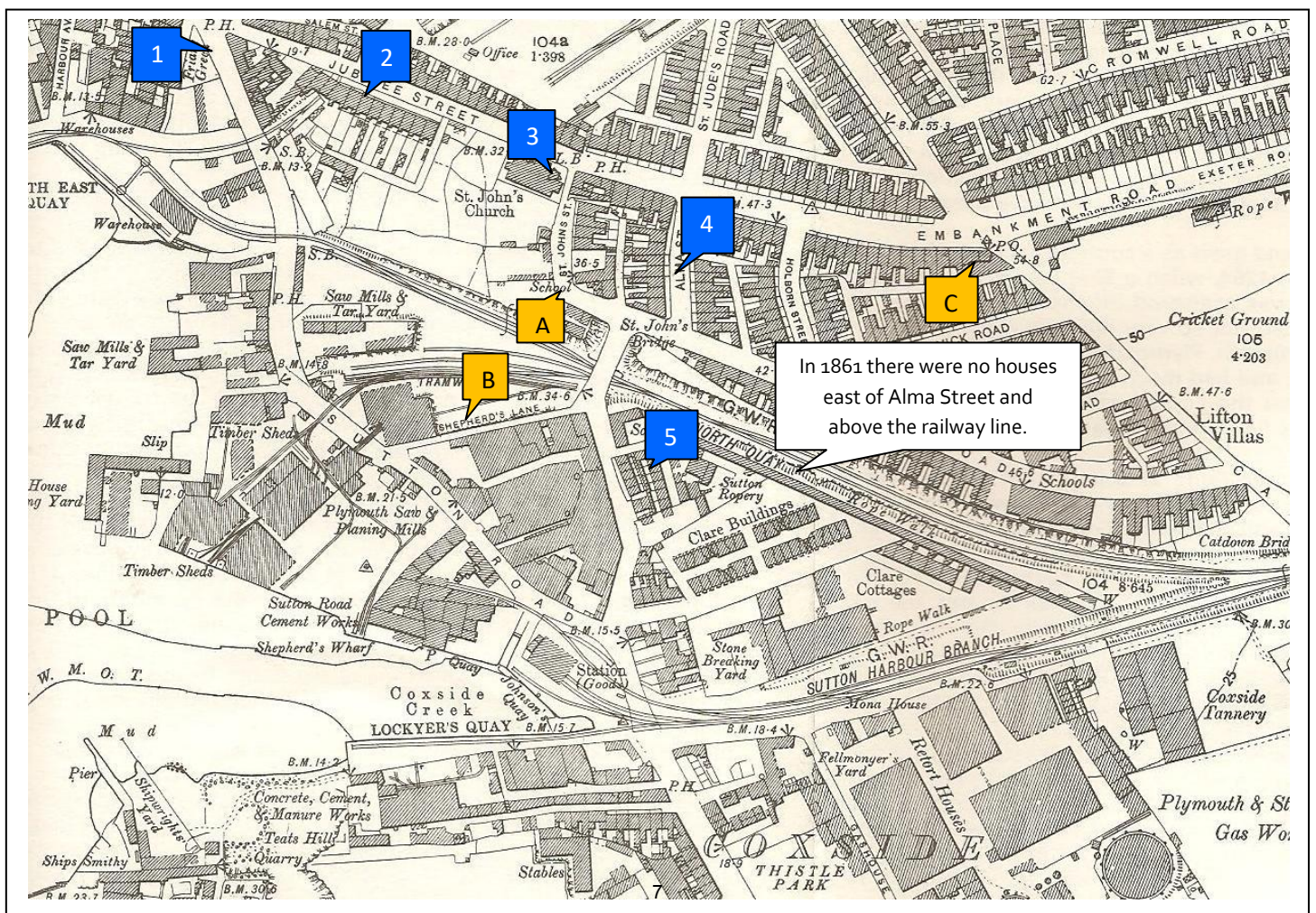
The nameplate to say that this was ALMA COTTAGES was attached to the lower railings, but this was now St. John's Bridge Road. However, I am not entirely certain that these cottages in Coxside are the ones where George and his family lived, so I will elucidate my doubt.

## DESCRIPTION OF ENUMERATION DISTRICT.

[This description is to be written in by the Enumerator from the Copy supplied to him by the Registrar. Any explanatory notes or observations calculated to make the description clearer or more complete, may be added by the Enumerator.]

Part of the Parish of Charles, comprising  
The South Side of Jubilee Street, from and including the Jubilee Inn; Brunswick Place; Brunswick Terrace;  
St John Street (lately Shepherd's Lane), with the New School; Jubilee Place; Alma Place; the Old Toll House  
at the Western Corner of Coldown Road; Jory Street, otherwise, Sutton Road; Jory's Almshouses; Marrowbone  
Slip; Sugar Refinery; Soap and Candle Works; R. Hanch Works; Clove Place; Sutton Place;  
Lottery Court; Part Street; Teats Hill; Lead Works; Queen Anna's Battery; Queen Anna's Place;  
Eastern Pier; Crans Row; Marine Place; Deadman's Bay; and the Houses adjoining the Breakwater Quay,  
called Higheraddon.

Beginning at **No.1** is the Jubilee Inn public house which survived on that corner under different names well over 100 years. 1 & 2 Brunswick Place came next immediately followed by the nine houses of the Georgian Brunswick Terrace dating from 1811 and highlighted **No.2**. No. 1 housed John Bayly a timber merchant and solicitor, whilst at No.3 lived William Shilston a well-known Plymouth ship builder and at No.7 lived James Hicks a Plymouth surgeon. Passing the parish church of St. John the Evangelist Sutton-on-Plym which was built in the early 1840's we reach St. John's Street **No.3** where there were four houses which also show on the map. John Weeks notes its previous name of Shepherds Lane (shown at B) and that there is a new school shown on the corner at A (still extant). He then records six houses in Jubilee Place which I cannot identify, before moving into Alma Street at **No.4** where there are only four houses and one of those was empty. Next comes Alma Place **No.5** and he begins at No.8 and works through to No. 2 before passing on to an Old Toll House whose location, as it is described, is indicated at C. However at least half of the area in 1861 did not survive until 1891, but some names survived to the present day – Teats Hill; Queen Ann's Battery and Thistle Park etc. The question remains, however – where were ALMA COTTAGES? Were they the same as ALMA PLACE? If so why are there more than 7 shown on the map?



# ALMA COTTAGES



## ALMA PLACE - 1861

- 2 – Samuel TILLING 63 Ship surveyor
- 3 – Frederick SPINNEY 41 Hatter
- 4 – Mary SAVORY 38 Widow & clerk
- 5 – Thomas MARSHALL 39 House builder
- 6 – Rebecca DITCHAM 63**
- 7 – John PERRIAM 52 Master mariner
- 8 – William ROWE 32 Commercial agent



The row of cottages hidden behind

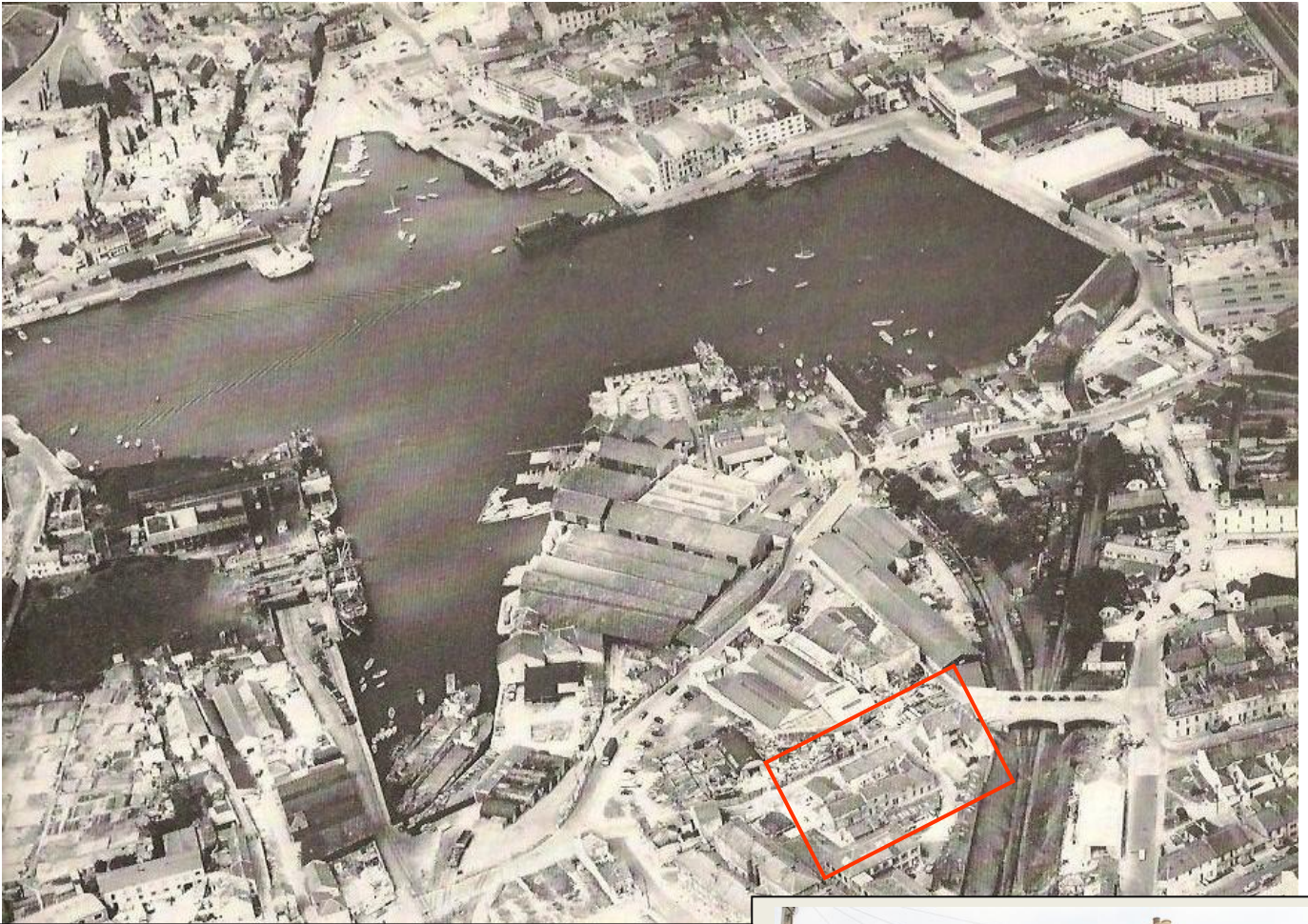


All the houses in the 1861 census were occupied by 'middle-class' people and three houses employed young girl servants.

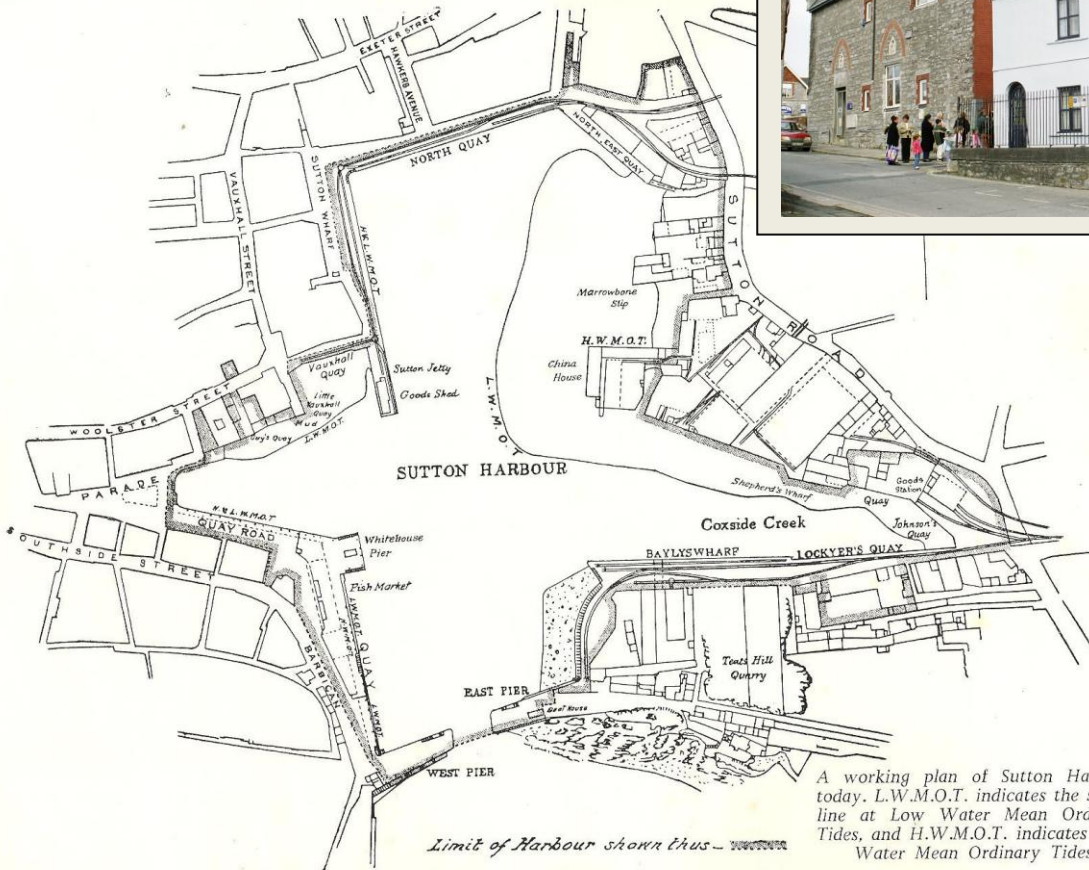
All except No.3 contained 3, 4 or 5 residents. No.3 contained 12 people from 3 families, so could that be the house across the lower end and beneath this caption?

I am not totally convinced that these are the same Alma 'Cottages' as the ones recorded in 1861. If they are then the numbering of them has totally changed. Note St. John's Church in the distance.





**2 ALMA COTTAGES** in Coxside is next to the end and the block can be clearly seen highlighted in the aerial photograph. The map is closer to the date of George's arrival in Plymouth, but shows only Sutton Harbour and its quays.



A working plan of Sutton Harbour today. L.W.M.O.T. indicates the shoreline at Low Water Mean Ordinary Tides, and H.W.M.O.T. indicates High Water Mean Ordinary Tides.

# An Introduction to the Eddystone Light

In the summer of 1836, Captain Robert Welbanks RN embarked on a tour of inspection of the southern lighthouses of the Trinity House that took him from Usk and Flatholm in the Severn Estuary, westwards along the South Wales coast as far as Strumble Head and the Smalls. He then left Wales from Carmarthen for Bristol and thence to Barnstaple, North Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, before heading up channel to finish at the Knab Light Vessel off the Isle of Wight and this tour lasted from the 21 July (when he left London for Bristol) until the evening of the 20 August (when he left Southampton for London).

He kept a pocketbook with him and gradually filled it with notes that now give us a glimpse into the lighthouse service as seen by a naval man with a critical eye for detail and discipline.

Captain Welbanks left Truro on Saturday 13 August 1836 and travelling by carriage through St Austell, Lostwithiel and Liskeard, he eventually reached Devonport that same evening.

*On Monday morning the 15 August he was ready to go to sea. He wrote, at 9 am embarked upon the Trinity Tender to the EDDYSTONE Light and ran out to the Lighthouse with a strong breeze at NNW and a considerable swell and whilst passing the lighthouse hailed to know if it was possible to land which being answered in the affirmative and that the sea was tolerably smooth in the Gut. Capt. ARTHUR, John ARTHUR(?) and myself landed and examined the building it being at the time just low water. We staid about a quarter of an hour when the flood making and the men in the lighthouse thinking it would be dangerous to stay longer we returned to the tender and thence to the Breakwater where we landed and afterward went to Mr. ....*

*The Light Tender is miserably manned - the Master is an Invalid Midshipman of the Navy whose pay is 23/- per month - a Superannuated Gunner at 20/- pm - a Cook to a Steam Vessel at 20/- pm and a Boy who was sick the whole passage at 5/- per week and all incompetent except the Gunner.*

*The Lighthouse has two rows of lamps 8 in each and the people are comfortably housed considering the exposed situation at the Rocks. The landing is more precarious and difficult than either the Longships or Smalls and until the boats be well manned and well under command there is great danger of being driven on the Rocks which lie to the eastward of the Gut.*

*By an inscription in the doorway to the Gallery the building was finished August 24th 1759 and underneath "Laus Deo" and it appears in all respects as perfect as when Mr Smeaton left it.*

*The names of the Light Keepers this day were - William COCK - John MURCH - William CLOADE and another was there whose name I did not get. The men receive £7-10s-0d per quarter and £7-10s-0d per quarter is also allowed for victualling and they have 3lb of tea and 5lb of sugar each month, one bottle of Porter each per day and some other trifling allowances.*

It is unlikely to have been very much different 25 years later when George Knott closed the front door of No.2 Alma Cottages and looked around him, deciding which way he should go. As he set off heading for Sutton Road and North Quay his world could not have been more different from the one he had recently left behind at South Foreland. Gone were the open cliff-tops where the children were free to roam. Gone was the open vista across the English

Channel where the coast of France was clearly visible on a good day. Gone, too, was the security of being known and respected by everyone in the neighbourhood.

Instead they had found themselves in the midst of the expanding industrial area of Coxside, which seemed to be noisily busy all day and well into the night. There was a distinct and not altogether pleasant smell in the air from the many manufactories that surrounded them. A thin veil of smoke and steam always hung over the works of the Plymouth & Stonehouse Gas Company. There was a thriving chemical industry making linseed oil, varnish and tar products for ships. There were factories making starch, blue, soap and black lead for the kitchens and wash houses of the nation. Alongside the many roperies, there was a cement works, three potteries and even refineries for making salt and sugar.<sup>2</sup>

Buttoned securely into the pocket of his uniform frock coat George carried the Superintendent's message instructing him to present himself at the Custom House Quay steps on Plymouth's Barbican, one hour before the morning high tide, from whence he would be taken the fourteen miles out into the English Channel to a reef of razor edged, granite rocks on which sat Smeaton's elegant tower awaiting the arrival of its new Principal Keeper for his first tour of duty on the Eddystone Light

As he rounded the corner of the *Three Crowns* public house, he immediately recognised a uniform similar to his own worn by a man deep in conversation with another man who had his back towards George. Words passed furtively between them and the second man hurriedly slapped a peaked cap on his head and turned cautiously towards George. So these were the men with whom George would now have to share two months of his life on a regular basis. What would they be like? What would they think of him?

It would have been nice to have put names to these two men. Theoretically they should be available, as the Principal Keeper on census night – Saturday/Sunday 7/8 April 1861 – was required to enter the names of himself and his two assistants as '*present in the lighthouse on census night.*' Unfortunately the problem for him then became returning the form to the harbourmaster, whose responsibility it was to collect those of ships at sea and rock lighthouses. The form from the Eddystone Lighthouse may have taken days or even weeks to reach him and the potential for it to be mislaid becomes significant.

I have searched that census in depth and cannot find any reference to the lighthouse, which is a great pity. However, I did find two keepers on duty on the Breakwater Lighthouse. They were Principal Light Keeper Richard Flinn who was 67 years old and from Exmouth and his Assistant Light Keeper Robert Pizey who was 33 years old from Great Yarmouth in Norfolk and both of them had wives somewhere ashore.<sup>3</sup>

Two keepers who were not on duty were located living not very far from where George and Catherine Knott had settled. Joseph Steer was 30 years old and from the most unlikely seafaring community of Bovey Tracey in Devon. His wife Susan came from nearby Chudleigh and with their two girls Hephzibah (4) and Rhoda (3) they lived at 10 Radnor Street, just off Regent Street and not far from Charles Church.<sup>4</sup> Around the corner at 41 Regent Street lodged the unmarried Herbert Porton who, at 23 years of age, must have been relatively new to the lighthouse service yet born in Norwich.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> This list was extracted from page 62 of SUTTON HARBOUR by Crispin Gill

<sup>3</sup> 1861 RG09/1445 Folio 27 Page 1

<sup>4</sup> 1861 RG09/1436 Folio 33 Page 13

<sup>5</sup> 1861 RG09/1436 Folio 29 Page 5

It is my belief that this is probably the second crew of the Eddystone Light ashore awaiting their turn to go back to the reef for their next spell of duty. The only thing wrong with my supposition is that there should have been a third man. Is it possible that the missing third man was George Knott not yet arrived from South Foreland?

So were the two men that George met on the Custom House Quay, Joe Steer and Bert Porton? I wish I could say for certain, but I will continue in that assumption.

Although Captain Welbanks encountered four keepers on his visit in 1836, three of whom he named, the practise of using three keepers to keep watch on a rock lighthouse began after a dreadful incident on the Smalls Lighthouse off Pembrokeshire in 1800. The keepers had been marooned for weeks by a succession of storms and when relief finally reached the rock the rescuers were horrified to find one keeper dead and the other out of his mind. Living with the body and the fear that he would be charged with murder had driven him insane.

As George led the way over the side of the tender DILLIGENT <sup>6</sup> from the dinghy that had ferried them to the Cattewater, his two mates had already decided that George was a 'landlubber' and that a few well chosen and suitably embellished yarns would be a suitable initiation to the ways of the sea. What better story to begin with than the one that had occurred at the Eddystone Reef just a few months before on New Year's Day 1861. Bert hadn't been there at the time, but he joined in the re-telling of the story with all the enthusiasm and imagination of an 'eye witness.'

It was a dark night, that first night of the New Year, but the light was shining bright and clear, yet the two-masted brigantine AIRE sailed straight onto the reef. There was a crew of 16 on board bound from Woolwich Dockyard to Malta with a cargo of Government stores which had been intended to replace that which was lost off the Lizard when the steamer CZAR foundered two years before. As the AIRE began to sink, the American ship BOSTONIAN came to her assistance and rescued the crew, but the Captain and two others had already launched a boat and were making for Plymouth. So with 13 survivors on board, the BOSTONIAN resumed her passage to the south of France only to come to grief twenty four hours later on the Hanois Reef in the Channel Islands. Ten of the AIRE's survivors were drowned. At the Board of Trade inquiry into the loss of the AIRE, her master declared that he had been blown off course, but the keepers were sceptical stating that there were only occasional blustery winds.<sup>7</sup>

*Stepping onto the rock* - as the keepers described the next stage in George's journey, was an understatement. In fact it was downright difficult, even dangerous. Four seamen guided the dinghy into the lee of the rock – the Gut as the seamen knew it – and although the rock provided some shelter, the sea was slopping about erratically between the rocks on a tide that was still on the ebb. Two of the keepers coming off duty had come down to the base of the lighthouse to lend a hand, but one had remained and was standing in a doorway that had been opened about half way up the tower. From here an iron beam projected outwards with a rudimentary pulley system attached that was essential to what happened next. Both bronze doors opened outwards deliberately so that the weight of the water, when the sea was angry, could not batter them inwards against the large granite cills that retained them in place.

It had already been decided that Bert, as the youngest, should go first and Joe Steer as the most experienced would go last and George would then have helping hands and words of advice on both sides as he made his first 'crossing..

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<sup>6</sup> DILLIGENT was built in Falmouth in 1845 as a 50-ton sailing cutter with a TH crew of seven  
Parliamentary Papers – Shipping Safety 1861 Page 34 – Courtesy ALK Archivist Gerry Douglas-Sherwood

<sup>7</sup> *The Sea Thine Enemy* by Captain Kenneth Langmaid 1966 and reproduced in 1997 in *Eddystone* by Martin Boyle p18/19

# Changing the Keepers

(Form A.)

76

LIST of the CREW and OTHERS on BOARD of the SHIP or VESSEL called the *Diligent* on the NIGHT of SUNDAY, APRIL 7th, 1861.

NAME and SURNAME	CONDITION	AGE OF		RANK or OCCUPATION	WHERE BORN	If Deaf and Dumb or Blind
		Males	Females			
1 The Capt. Ditcham	Married	46		Superintendent Trinity Lights	Mar-mouth	North
2 The Giles Hopkin	Married	44		Master of Trinity Tender	Mar-mouth	North
3 Edward Wingeat	Single	41		Seaman do do	Mar-mouth	North
4 Joseph Granger	Single	37		Seaman do do	Mar-mouth	North
5 Samuel Collings	Single	26		Seaman do do	Mar-mouth	North
6 Benjamin Redding	Married	33		Seaman do do	Mar-mouth	North
7 James George Woodcock	Unmarried	18		Apprentice to Captain	Mar-mouth	North
8						
9						



## TRINITY HOUSE TENDER DILLIGENT

Truro District  
April 7th/8th 1861

### Superintendent of Lighthouses

Thomas DITCHAM 62

### Master of Trinity Tender

Giles HOPKINS 44

### Seamen

Edward WINGEAT 41  
Joseph GRANGER 37  
Samuel COLLINGS 26  
Benjamin REDDING 33

### Trinity House Apprentice

James ???? 18

In the painting by William Gibbons dated 1868 the operation of changing the keepers is imaginatively portrayed. Below is Ken Trethewey's image of the boiling sea around its base.



It all happened in a flash. George had no recollection of what he did, but the other keepers, who were on hand to help him, weren't needed. With his heart pumping frantically George took stock of his surroundings surprised to find himself standing upright on the rock. The dinghy was bouncing around several feet beneath him and Smeaton's tower soared 72 feet overhead. The crude steps on which he stood were smooth and slippery with seaweed and it was hard to visualise the rock being underwater and often swept by raging gales.

While George and his mates were concentrating on getting on to the rock without harm, the outgoing keepers were busy with the stores. The keepers' sea chests, carefully wrapped in waterproofed sailcloth were swinging through the air backwards and forwards between the tower and the dinghy with careful dexterity. The food supplies and other essentials were piled inside the lighthouse's storeroom door, and very soon the keepers were shaking hands all around and taking their turn to jump into the dinghy for the voyage home to Plymouth.

As the dinghy made its way clear of the rock and back to the DILIGENT, standing a safe distance to leeward, George took one last, long look at the tiny vessel, no bigger than a Plymouth trawler and waved to the crew on deck before mounting the first of the iron rungs to climb to the door of the lighthouse.<sup>8</sup> As he did so George glanced up and noticed the date '1759' carved into the stone above the door. *Hmmm... 102 years*, he mused, but his thoughts were interrupted by the helping hand he was offered from the open door.

The spiral granite staircase was damp and creepy and after a few complete turns they emerged into the Tank Room. There was little to say about it as it was simply that, a store room for the water they would use in the kitchen and the oil they would burn in the lamp and it was lined around the circumference with kegs fitted in between the large tanks, yet there was one thing that George could not help noticing. There was no window to let in any light.

On one side of the room was a straight wooden ladder and Joe directed George to climb it. As George ascended the ladder he passed through a hatch in another stone floor and came out in a second Store Room. Here were stacked the barrels and boxes containing everything that they would need and enough to last twelve weeks instead of the eight they were due to spend there – just in case the worst should happen. Of course there were a lot more boxes waiting to be sorted and put in their rightful place so that the items in them could be easily found when they were needed. George was relieved to see his sea chest was also there, as he had completely forgotten about it in the excitement of the transfer. *Bert can unship and stow the lifting gear while we have a look up top*, Joe said with a wink.

*No, we're not there yet*, Joe replied to the unspoken question in George's eyes, as his hand reached out to grasp the rope 'handrail' of the next ladder that would take him upwards.

Now this was better, here was a space that was recognisable as a living quarter. There was a stove on one side with a cooking range. There was a rough wooden table and three equally rough wooden chairs. There was a dresser for utensils and crockery and not a lot else. *That table is supposed to be the one used by Smeaton*, Joe said waving his arm towards it.<sup>9</sup> *They say that's where he wrote his book*<sup>10</sup> *and this is where we'm due to spend a lot of our time*, Joe said taking a pipe from his uniform coat pocket. *I used to bring clays out with me, but I broke so many that the wife said I'd be better off with a briar, so she bought me one! Never without it now*, he added, looking at it lovingly.

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<sup>8</sup> 1861 Census RG09 Piece 1556 Folio 76 Page 1 printed on another page, was handed to the Truro District and therefore was probably passed to the Harbourmaster at St. Mawes as their first port of call after spending census night at sea.

<sup>9</sup> *Smeaton's Tower* by L.H.Merrett page 11 reprinted in pamphlet form from *Maritime History* Volume 5 No.2

<sup>10</sup> The book was published in 1793 as *Smeaton's Narrative of the building* etc., etc. A copy is held by Dr. Kenneth Trethewey

George pointed to one of the windows with its cill more than two feet deep.<sup>11</sup> *Well at least we can see the sea from here. My wife would have had a vase of flowers on there - quick as flash.*

*Oh! You'll see the sea alright. There'll be days when 'er is out there looking in at 'ee,* Joe responded. *We get some real blows here. Worst ones are from the south east when the water goes right over the top. You can feel the tower shudder, as if her's bin 'it in the stomach. Winces she does. We've told 'em ashore every time we get it, but they takes no notice. Tells us that nothing will happen to the tower. If she goes 'er'll just fall over like an old candle. Can you believe that?* Joe was really going ahead now. It must have been a favourite topic.<sup>12</sup> *Where do we sleep then?* George interrupted, making towards the wooden ladder.

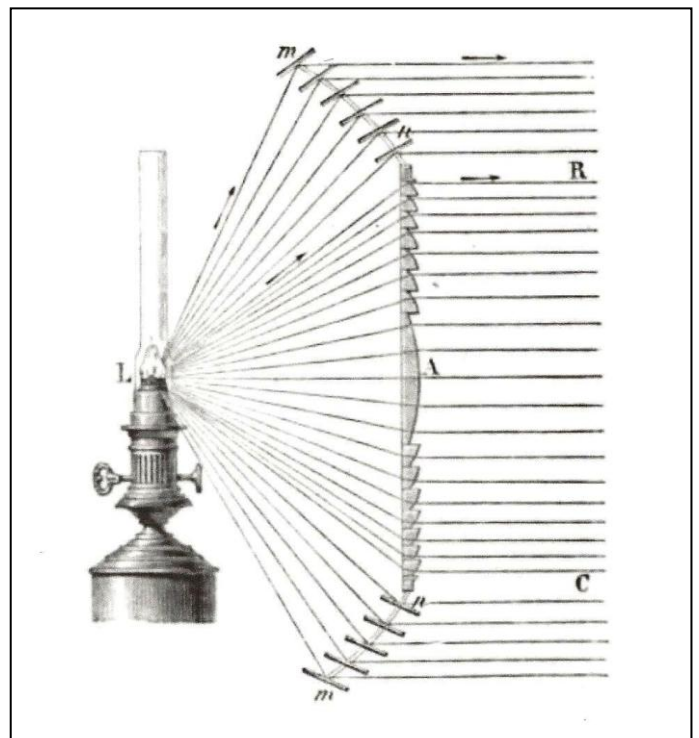
The final floor before the lantern was really strange. There were only two bunks against the wall, but because the wall was curved so were the bunks. *How do you sleep in that?* George asked incredulously. *Oh! You'll get used to it. You sleeps on your side with your knees pulled up. S'easy really.* Joe replied whilst poking the pipe he had lit from the stove below. *But why only two, there's three of us,* George persisted. *Well,* Joe sucked on his pipe, *that's Trinity for you. They says one keeper's on watch, so 'ee don't need a bunk. Obvious ain't it.*<sup>13</sup>

The tour had only taken twenty minutes so far and there was now nothing left to see except the lantern. As George entered the bottom of this glass miracle, flooded with sunlight, he grabbed the handrail and mounted the tiny metal steps to the narrow circular walkway that encircled the incredible lens. It had been put there in 1845 and had replaced a bank of twenty four reflectors each with its own oil lamp using a cylindrical wick which drew the oil up through itself. George knew by experience just how difficult these were to keep clean. The reflectors were meant to be spotless, but it was a constant battle against the smeech from the oil, blackening the surfaces.

Joe broke into George's quiet contemplation by saying, *There's only one lamp, look, in the middle there. Ain't that marvellous? Cuts our work down.*

It would be interesting to know whether either keeper knew that they were looking at a dioptric lens. It had been invented in France in 1822 by Augustin Fresnel and it had been here in the Eddystone since 1845, just nine years after Trinity House had fitted the very first one in the new Start Point lighthouse.

Fresnell had noticed that light beams bent a little when shining through thick glass, so he used a bulls eye lens for the centre and surrounded it with concentric rings of prismatic glass with each ring projecting a little beyond the previous one. The effect of this was to capture the errant beams escaping from the centre and to bend them horizontally into a single beam.



<sup>11</sup> *Smeaton's Tower* by L.H.Merrett page 7 reprinted in pamphlet form from *Maritime History* Volume 5 No.2

<sup>12</sup> *Smeaton's Tower* by L.H.Merrett page 9 reprinted in pamphlet form from *Maritime History* Volume 5 No.2

<sup>13</sup> *Smeaton's Tower* by L.H.Merrett page 11 reprinted in pamphlet form from *Maritime History* Volume 5 No.2

Inside the lantern, but below the optic, there was enough room to use as a service room. The need for preparing wicks and refilling oil reservoirs was something which Smeaton hadn't anticipated, but it was convenient to have a place to work which was at the same level as the gallery. There was then no need to constantly ascend and descend ladders.

George ducked under the low doorway and followed Joe out onto the gallery. It took a few moments to orientate himself, but Joe led him around to the point where they had a clear view into Plymouth Sound. It was a magnificent sight on this sunlit day with only a slight breeze to bother them and Joe was soon pointing out the prominent landmarks. Rame Head on the west side was distinctive, shaped almost like a pyramid with its pimple of a chapel perched right on the apex. It was just possible to make out the white lantern of the Breakwater Lighthouse, but behind it and way over to its right lay the forest of masts of the Channel Fleet.

The sight prompted Joe to speak.

*There'll be plenty of ships to watch from 'ere goin' in and out. It's the men o' war that fascinate me. Once you've seen a brig or a ketch, you've seen 'em all, but one o' them black hulls bristling with guns.....well!*

He sucked on his pipe admiringly and blew out a cloud of smoke that was instantly whipped away by the breeze.

*After a while you can pick 'em out. Not by name o' course, although sometimes they comes quite close to us and I puts the glass on 'em. AGINCOURT is a favourite and like NORTHUMBERLAND she 'as five masts, but it's darn difficult to tell t'other from which. One of 'em is in the Fleet now, but I couldn't see 'er name as we passed. Of course WARRIOR is often in and out. Joe paused for a moment looking quizzically at George before continuing,*

*If you don't know 'er you soon will. She's a beauty. I likes to try and make models of 'em with me knife. We gets some pretty fair driftwood past 'ere sometimes.*

George had stopped listening as Joe rambled on, but when he said that, he looked at Joe, who was still lost in his reverie. Making a model? Now there's a thought.

George turned away from the view of the coast and looked seaward and was immediately captivated by another magnificent sight. Hundreds of Gannets had gathered in a brilliant white cloud that wheeled and spiralled upwards less than half a mile from the reef. Out of this cloud individual birds streaked downwards at great speed, their black tipped wings held straight back as they sliced into the sea with barely a splash.

*Must be a shoal over there close to the top, Joe guessed. Pilchards probably, he added, trying to impress his colleague with his knowledge.*

As George soaked up the sight of this natural wonder, he realised that Bert had appeared at the rail without saying a word. He didn't know how long he had been there and he had completely forgotten about him, but Bert was a diligent young man, who had learnt quickly what needed to be done and had just got on with it. He knew that his seniors would soon be pitching in with the work. They were each beginning to feel that they belonged to a good crew. George was already at ease. This was a different life, but he could get to like it.

George eased the fob watch out of his waistcoat pocket and flicked the lid open.

*Goodness me, he said. We're already half way through the afternoon watch, he said ashamedly. What do you think Bert's been doin',* Joe said to spare George's blushes.

*Perhaps I should take the last dog watch to make amends,* George said with a wry smile.

There were four watches

4 a.m. to noon; noon to 8 p.m.; 8 p.m. to midnight and the dog watch midnight to 4 a.m.



## A Small Matter of Life and Death

Catherine and George had now been married for twelve years and during that time Catherine had rarely had a moment when George was not somewhere nearby in the house. It was difficult to get used to the idea that he was fourteen miles distant, out in the English Channel and that she would not see him for weeks.

She had got to know Rebecca Ditcham quite well, as she had taken an interest in the Knott family from the day they moved in. Catherine took to her quite easily and it was almost like having her mother around the place when George was away on the light. Of course Rebecca's husband Thomas was often away too, pursuing his duties to the letter in visiting the light stations all around the south west coast. Rebecca's daughter Eliza was also a welcome visitor at the Knott's cottage, for at 26 years old she was only seven years younger than Catherine and although she was unmarried, she was very good with the young children. Thomas, Rebecca's younger son, worked in a grocer's shop, but he sometimes thoughtfully dropped in with a basket of vegetables which Catherine thought was only an excuse to come in and talk to the four boys.<sup>14</sup> Henry was a confident 10-year-old and enjoyed the opportunity to show off his developing enthusiasm for lighthouses, which was never to leave him.<sup>15</sup>

Matilda was the only girl in the family until baby Ann arrived in March 1861, so the visiting ladies gave them the most attention and a lot of sympathy as sisters to four lively boys, so it came as a bit of shock to everyone that in the summer of 1863 Matilda developed a mysterious complaint with one of her knees. This was somewhat depressing as Catherine had realised by the August of that year that she was expecting another baby. Matilda's knee did not respond to any of the treatments suggested and in October she was admitted to the South Devon Hospital in Notte Street.

This hospital had been built in a cherry orchard near the site of Princess Square on the south side of Notte Street and had been opened in 1840 with 55 beds, but in 1863 the Royal Albert Wing was opened with another 50 beds. Matilda was admitted to a dedicated children's ward, but even the attentions of the resident surgeon George Silvester, did not cure little Matilda.<sup>16</sup>

On Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> October 1863 she died with her mother and father at her side. It was fortunate indeed that George was at home. Catherine needed his support as they both recalled the heartache of 12 years ago when their eldest child, Ann, died as a 16 month-old toddler.

It was Monday when George walked over to the Registrar's Office to record Matilda's death and she was probably buried in the Charles Parish Churchyard just a day or two later. She was only nine years old. The certificate vaguely records the cause of death as '*disease of the knee,*' but in the 21<sup>st</sup> century what are we to make of that? It is difficult today to accept that any problem with a knee could be ultimately fatal.

Catherine was not so lucky when she went into labour towards the end of February 1864. When George finally made it ashore from the rock he was surprised and delighted to be greeted by the well expanded lungs of Mary Jane Knott who was now more than a month old.<sup>17</sup> She had been born on Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1864 at 2 Alma Cottages and she had numerically restored the family to exactly the way it was before little Matilda died. However, she would not be intimidated by four brothers, as family folklore suggests that she was always ill-tempered and wilful as a child. Yet she would become indispensable to her parents, keeping house for them until 1897, when she finally married a soldier from Dover Castle.

<sup>14</sup> This is based on the Census entry for 1861 at RG09/1434 Folio 25 Page 9

<sup>15</sup> Henry became one of the next generation of light keepers in the Knott family.

<sup>16</sup> Plymouth Data website – researched by Brian Moseley.

<sup>17</sup> Catherine registered the birth on the 31 March therefore assuming George to be on duty.

## A Model Tour of Duty

George Knott had lost count of the number of times he had made the two-hour voyage out to the Eddystone Reef on the tender DILLIGENT which belonged to the Trinity House. He had developed a great friendship with the members of the crew and they all knew George better than he knew himself.

It was the winter of 1865 when the skipper Giles Hopkins asked the inevitable question, *When ar'ee goin' ashore for good George?* George was stood beside him in the port side waist looking towards the fascinating stone pencil that stood erect on a horizon that was raising and falling. *Wish I knew*, was George's curt reply.

It set him thinking about his time on the rock. There had been good and bad days. He had seen the sea azure blue and as smooth as glass, yet he had also seen it smashing itself into a white foam on the red granite reef. He had felt the tower shudder to its foundation and any keeper who denied a fleeting moment of fear that it was about to disintegrate, would have been called a liar. Mr. Ditcham had been told about these occurrences, but he had simply reiterated the possibility of a structural survey.

However, there had been no dramatic or drastic incidents on the reef involving the loss of a ship or a life and for that he was thankful. George had been quite sorry to say farewell to Joe Steer, his Assistant Keeper, for they shared a lot in common. Joe had given up his efforts at making models of the warships he saw, for want of accurate drawings of them. Instead he had transferred his talent to sketching and water-colouring pictures of them and George had to admit that some of them were very good.

It was George who was now the model-maker. He had decided, almost from the day of his arrival, that he would attempt to reproduce an exact replica of their working home – Smeaton's Eddystone Light. He had used his time ashore to walk around the shipbuilders' yards and timber yards searching for small pieces of discarded timber from which the lighthouse was made and it had taken him two entire winters to finish it.

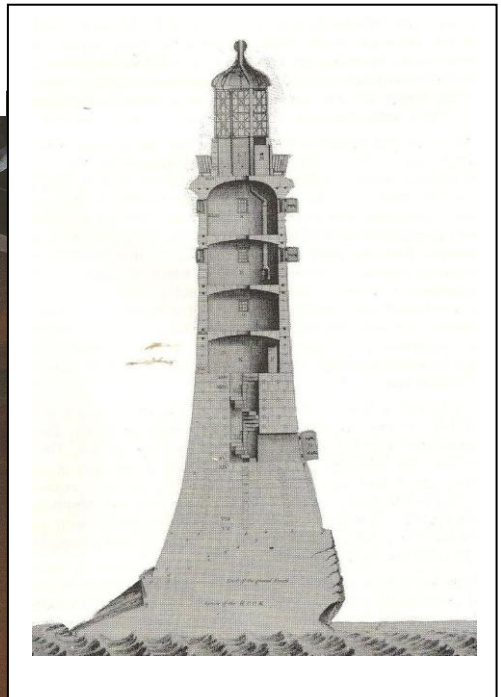
Fortunately a photograph survives of this wonderful construction and the best description of it comes from the notes of a grandson, who actually owned it.

On Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> October 1934 Frederick Goldsack Knott<sup>18</sup> addressed a meeting in North Devon in which he said, *the model stands about 4 feet 6 inches in height. It is made precisely to scale of mahogany and sycamore and consists of a perfect representation in miniature of this famous tower.....Each floor of the structure is detachable and reveals a model of every fitting and piece of furniture to be found in the lighthouse itself. The granite blocks which form the base are faithfully portrayed in miniature being both dovetailed and keyed.*



<sup>18</sup> Frederick Goldsack KNOTT was born in Barnstaple in 3Q/1891 to Herbert Knott & Dinah

# The Historic Dockyard Chatham



The display above states that a similar model stood in the entrance hall at Trinity House but was destroyed in the Blitz of 1941. A similar story has existed in the family but no proof of its accuracy has been found.

The photograph below the medals shows the interior of the living room (the middle room behind the upper light wood band) complete with all its furniture. Each level can be removed separately.

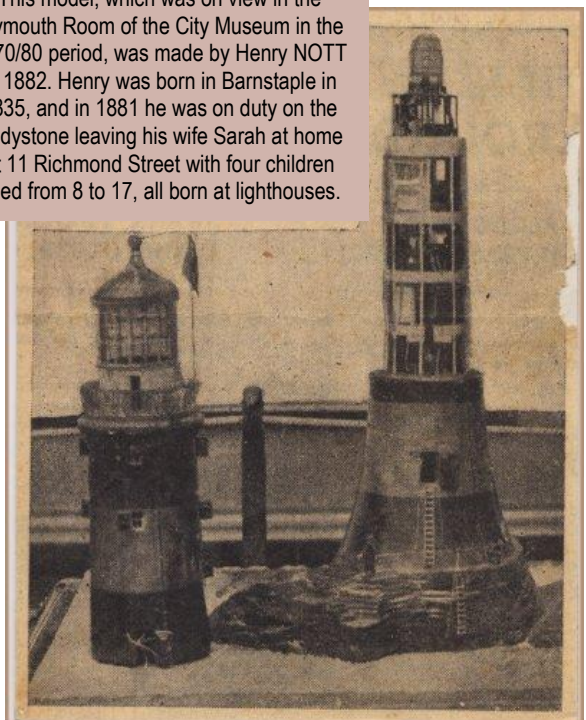
This model, which was on view in the Plymouth Room of the City Museum in the 1970/80 period, was made by Henry NOTT in 1882. Henry was born in Barnstaple in 1835, and in 1881 he was on duty on the Eddystone leaving his wife Sarah at home at 11 Richmond Street with four children aged from 8 to 17, all born at lighthouses.

When Fred KNOTT died in 1981 the model and other precious items of George's career disappeared into the previously unknown family and were thought to be 'lost.' Many years later they unexpectedly appeared in an auction house and my brother Ken had word that the National Maritime Museum was interested in buying them.

This was achieved and this display became possible in 2012.

It seems that the model is built to a 1:24 scale as in life it was 72 feet from the HWM (at the top of the rock) to the centre line of the optic mid-way up the lantern.

The brief description of George's career on display is badly inaccurate. However the two silver medals displayed explain the entry in Catherine's will in our possession. The middle medal was won by George Knott at the DEVON & CORNWALL WORKING CLASSICS INDUSTRIAL EXHIBITION held in Plymouth in 1865, whilst the lower medal was 'won by George Knott at the BIDEFORD FINE ART & INDUSTRIAL EXHIBITION held in Bideford in 1877.

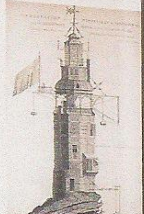




# GEORGE KNOTT, 1827-1904 LIGHTHOUSE KEEPER

## EDDYSTONE LIGHTHOUSE PRIZE-WINNING MODEL, c. 1865

George Knott, maker of this fine model of the Eddystone Lighthouse, was one of seven generations of lighthouse keepers. The Knotts hold the record for the longest continuous service of any family in Trinity House. His family had looked after the south Foreland light since 1730 and George was born at St Margaret's Bay, Dover. He took over his father's duties in 1851 before being sent to the Eddystone Lighthouse in 1861, where he served until 1866 and again between 1871 and 1881. His son, Henry Thomas Knott, completed the family's service with Trinity House, working at various lighthouses until 1906.



THE FIRST EDDYSTONE LIGHTHOUSE →  
Designed by Thomas Telford and built by James Finlayson and James Watson in 1759.

**KNOTT FAMILY TREE**

John Knott  
1700-1750

John Knott  
1750-1810

John Knott  
1810-1866

Henry Thomas Knott  
1866-1906

**GEORGE KNOTT**  
1827-1904

Henry Thomas Knott  
1904-1917

**MEDALS**

**MEDAL 1877** →  
Commemorating the Jubilee of the Eddystone Lighthouse by John Knott.

**MEDAL**  
Awarded to George Knott for his work on the Eddystone and Foreland Lighthouses, 1861-1877.

**MEDAL**  
Awarded to George Knott for his work on the Eddystone Lighthouse, 1871-1881.



Highly detailed, and to a standard which won awards in the 19th century, the model splits at each floor level to reveal how the lighthouse was built and how the keepers lived. There are seven sections to the model - foundations, entrance level, two stores, kitchen, bedroom and light room. Knott made at least two models of the Eddystone Lighthouse. Another was destroyed during the Blitz in 1941, while on display at the Admiralty.



THE KITCHEN  
George Knott made this during his time as lighthouse keeper.

## A New Light Beckons

After two months on the rock, George was always glad to be going home to Catherine and the children. Today began, as many previous reliefs had done, with a nagging anxiety that the DILLIGENT would not appear to take them ashore, but the weather was fair and eventually the familiar outline hove into view and soon the transfer was under way.

As George settled himself in his favourite position on the leeside of the tender, the skipper joined him and they shook hands, as they always did. Expecting no more than a conversation exchanging experiences and opinions concerning their lives since the last time they had met, George was cut short when his friend said, *I've got instructions to drop you off at the Custom House Steps*. He looked knowingly at George and added, *the Superintendent would like a word with you!* George's stomach tensed as he immediately knew what those words meant.

The voyage home seemed to take twice as long as usual and when they finally arrived in the Cattewater, George made a special effort to speak to everyone on board the tender, just in case this really was the last time they would see each other.

Thomas Ditcham, the Superintendent of Lights for the South West, was as severe as ever. He was too old to change now, but he was a fair and reasonable man and he recognised that George had maintained the Eddystone Light extremely well during his time on the rock. There had been very few problems or complaints from any source. George was bursting to hear what he had to say, but he was in no hurry to say it. Turning over the papers scattered across his desk, it was a few minutes before he had arranged selected pages in front of him. As he looked at George, a thoughtful hand toyed with the line of his jaw.

*Rebecca tells me that you have six children and one of them only came last year.* George only nodded. *She also tells me,* Ditcham continued, *that your wife appears to know almost as much about keeping a light as you do.* George was at a loss to know where this conversation was leading. Ditcham extracted one of the papers from his pile and appeared to read it down. Without looking up he said, *do you know North Devon at all?* George had to admit he didn't and it was then that the Superintendent got down to business.

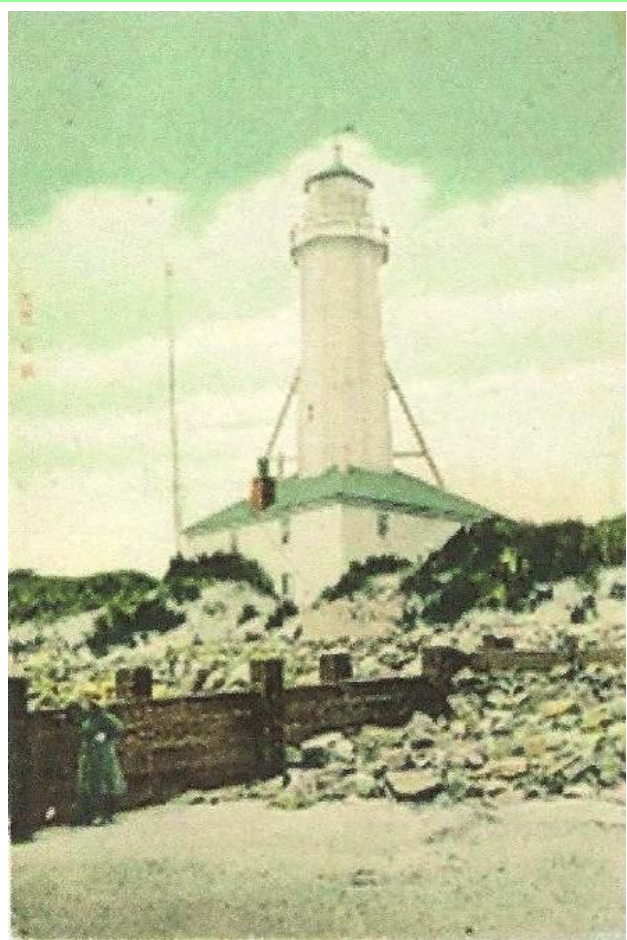
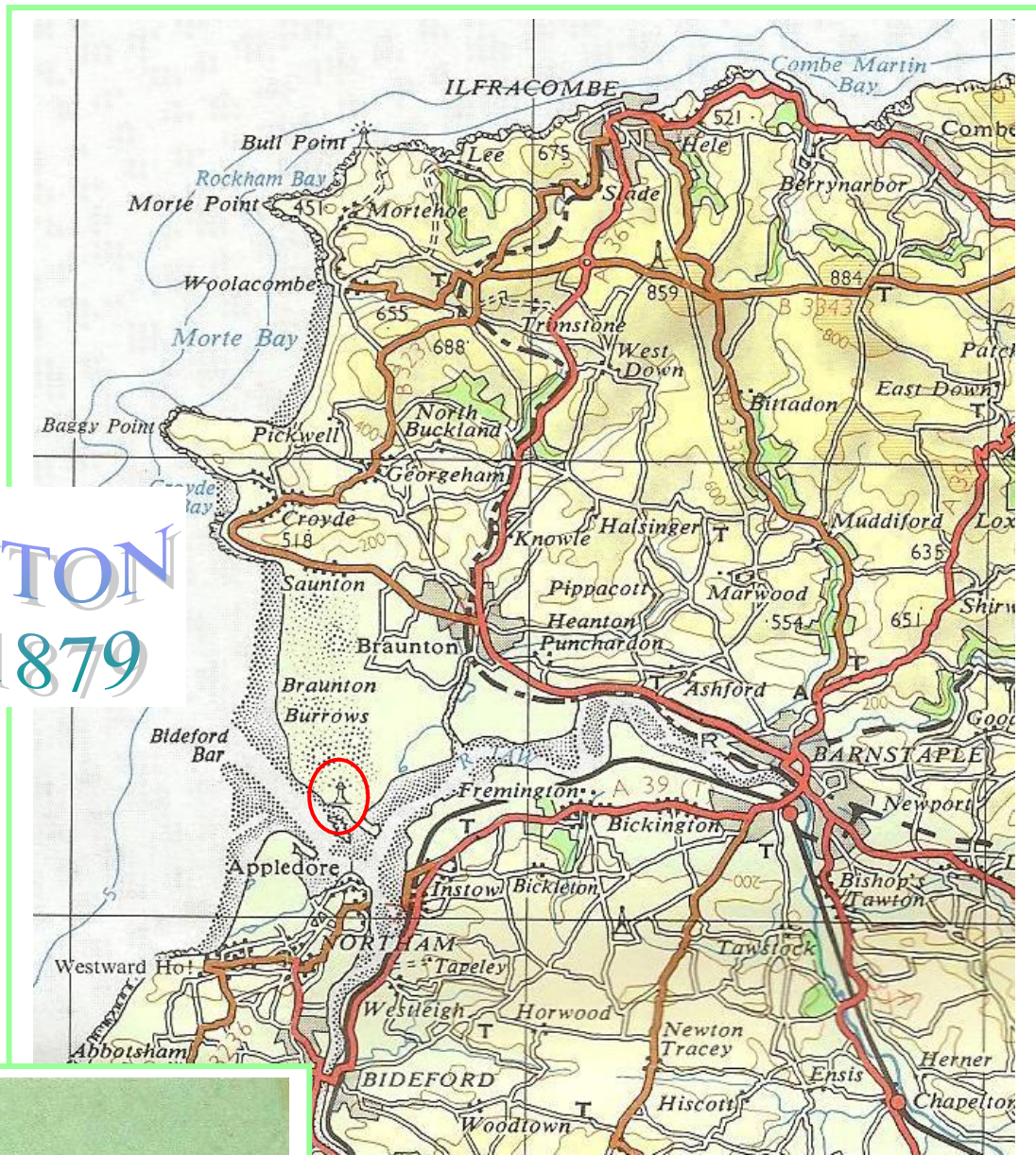
*Trinity House has a light on the edge of Bideford Bay that assists access to both Bideford and Barnstaple. Two rivers flow into the bay, the Torridge, on which Bideford stands, and the Taw flows past Barnstaple. Bideford is a very important sea port for the area and Appledore, at its mouth, is a shipbuilding town. The area is pure sand and where the two rivers meet and flow into the bay, a sand bar has built up that is a serious hazard to shipping. The prevailing westerlies in the Bristol Channel tends to blow outward-bound ships onshore and many have ended their days on that Bar, even when they had not wanted to make for Bideford.*

George was concentrating attentively as the Superintendent continued, *the light is the Bideford Bar Light and it is a two-man station, but there is a high and low light. The low light is just a simple structure on the open beach about 300 yards away. The Principal Keeper is about to retire and the other is due for relief, but you will be the first to arrive. The village of Braunton is about three miles to the north. That is where the school is. Oh! There's one more thing,* he added as if it was unimportant. *Has your wife ever sailed before?* Again George was taken aback and stammered, *well, no! She has never set foot on a ship.*

*The best way to reach the light would be to take a schooner from Lockyer Quay, near your house. There's plenty of trade with Bideford. It'll take 36 hours and maybe two nights. It might be a bit cramped, but it is the easiest way. I'll send a message when I have a berth.*

*Oh! We'll see,* thought George silently as Superintendent Thomas Ditcham stood up, held out his hand and shook George's hand warmly thanking him for all he had done and wishing him well on the new light in North Devon.

# BRAUNTON 1865 - 1879



## BIDEFORD BAR LIGHTHOUSE

Its Purpose

Its Keepers

Its Structure

The Local Shipping

The Knott Family

## Crossing the Bar - Why the Light was necessary

At the Trinity House Board Meeting of Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> September 1820, a letter was read out to the Elder Brethren.<sup>19</sup> It was dated just four days previously and had been sent by Captain John McCarthy of the 58-ton sloop VICTORY whose home port was Dungarvon (*County Waterford in Ireland*). He stated that he had left Ross in Ireland with 40 head of cattle bound for Milford (*Pembrokeshire*), but meeting with tempestuous weather and heavy seas, could not get near the Welch coast, but was forced into the Bay of Bideford. Neither himself nor his crew were acquainted with the harbour, but perceiving some erections and buildings on Braunton Burrowes, kept the two in direct line ahead and ran in over the Bar, an hour after high water, in perfect safety. Had it not been for the light houses now erecting, he thinks that the vessel and lives would have been totally lost. The Minutes of the Meeting continued that this occurrence will prove to the Board, the great utility the light houses will be to the public when completed, the same serving as beacons by day as well as lights by night.

This single event demonstrated the difficulty that scores of sailing vessels experienced when they encountered this sand bar at the mouth of the Taw/Torrige Estuary. For many ships it was their intended port, but for many more they were there simply seeking shelter and in some cases with dreadful consequences.

In 1865, just before the time of George Knott's arrival, this statement is statistically and graphically illustrated in a report that stated, '*the number of vessels that have entered this creek for the ports of Bideford and Barnstaple with cargo was 2276 vessels, with 32 foreign and 68 wind-bound vessels; a total of 2376.*<sup>20</sup>' In addition to the two ports on the Torrige and Taw respectively, Appledore, at the mouth of the estuary, was also a significant trading and shipbuilding port, as William Yeo became an important shipbuilder and timber merchant in the town from 1856. He had developed a considerable trade with Prince Edward Island in Newfoundland creating an extensive and frequent exchange of ships across the northern Atlantic.<sup>21</sup> Even Braunton was a 'port' with locally owned and crewed vessels frequently berthed alongside Velator Quay. Therefore, it was important that all this traffic should go about its business safely and without incident. Yet the sea is unforgiving and incidents were inevitable. So, exactly what is this Bar and how did it affect the shipping?

It is a natural phenomenon created by the interaction of the currents at the confluence of two rivers attempting to exit directly into the Atlantic Ocean. It is a sand and gravel barrier across the estuary between the Northam Burrows on the west side to the bottom corner of Saunton Sands through which the rivers have forced a path. It is that channel, scoured in the sea-bed, that the ships have to find and it is the inward shipping that find it most difficult. With the right depth of water, it is possible to navigate over the Bar, but this needs local knowledge and even then it can prove disastrous to the local men or 'Bar-Men' as they were known.<sup>22</sup>

A modern guide to coastal sailors describes the area thus, 'currents run with considerable strength over the Bar and into the Taw and Torrige, but off the Bar they are rotary in character and feeble in strength rarely exceeding 1 knot. Within the river it is said that the tidal current off Appledore can be 5 knots, whilst the outgoing river current, when opposed by strong westerlies can cause a high sea on the Bar.' This last statement is further amplified in the local experience when occasionally huge swells track across the Atlantic Ocean causing massive waves to break over the Bar. Woe betide anyone caught in their path.

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<sup>19</sup> Found in the Trinity House archives in the Guildhall Library by James Hogg – Courtesy of Kenneth Trethewey

<sup>20</sup> *The New Maritime History of Devon* Volume 2 Page 55 is itself a quote from the North Devon Journal January 1866.

<sup>21</sup> *The New Maritime History of Devon* Volume 2 Chapter 4 Pages 54/ 55

<sup>22</sup> This paragraph is based on information at [www.explorebraunton.org](http://www.explorebraunton.org) the Braunton Museum's website.

# The Keepers of Braunton's Light

**Benjamin PERRYMAN** was born in Barnstaple in 1786 and by **1841** he was already a widower living at home with his two unmarried daughters Mary and Elizabeth, but home was not a cottage on a village lane. It was the **Bideford Bar Lighthouse** on the Braunton Burrows. As the Principal Keeper, his Assistant Keeper on this two-man station was **James LAMPING** aged 35 years with his 30-year-old wife Mary,<sup>23</sup> yet they had no children.

At the time of the first census, the light had been lit for the past 21 years and it seems very likely that Perryman was one of its first keepers. After marrying in St. Anne's, Soho on the 24 January 1808 he returned to North Devon in the period 1819-22. On the burial of an 18-week old son Benjamin in Barnstaple on the 30 June 1824 it was recorded that the baby was the 'son of Benjamin of the Braunton Lighthouse.'

It was almost inevitable that the **1851** census should record that Ben Perryman had retired. He was located living with his son John and his family in Barnstaple's High Street, John Perryman was a watchmaker who had been born in London in 1812 and as well as providing a home for his father, he had to include his sister Mary who had lost her home in the lighthouse when their father retired. She, too, had been born in London in 1814,<sup>24</sup> but what had happened to Elizabeth?

Elizabeth Perryman married **William Smith SPICER** from Devonport, in the Barnstaple District early in 1843 and by the spring of 1845 they had seen their first child born. Mary Elizabeth Spicer was followed by John B Spicer in 1848 and William H Spicer was just 3 months old by the time of the 1851 Census. It can then be seen that William Spicer was the Assistant Keeper on the light and it is therefore very likely that these children had been born on the light (*only Braunton is stated*) and that Elizabeth's father had retired at some point during the mid-1840's

So, who had replaced Ben Perryman as Principal Keeper of the Bideford Bar Light? The answer was obvious. It was James Lamping, who was born in Bideford in 1804. However, he introduced a very unusual set of circumstances for a lighthouse. He was employing a house servant. Susan Passmore was a Braunton girl of 21 years of age, but James's wife Mary Ann was only 41 with no children, so why the need for a servant? Two families living on a light usually worked together to support their children and their men-folk, but this suggests to me that there was a psychological distance between them, even a little snobbery, as James was very clear that he was the 'Principal Keeper' in a system that had not been in existence for very long and at 47 years of age, he still had a long working life ahead of him.<sup>25</sup>

It was no surprise, therefore, to find that in the census of **1861** both Lamping and Spicer were still there,<sup>26</sup> but although Lamping had only changed his female servant for an 18-year-old called Mary Ann Witter, Spicer's circumstances looked peculiarly different. His wife should have been recorded as Elizabeth, but the entry for his wife records Mary Elizabeth aged 44. Although their eldest daughter was also called Mary Elizabeth, Elizabeth had a sister who was called Mary, but the Perryman family with whom she settled in Barnstaple in 1851 had totally disappeared, so it is not possible to see both sisters in the same census. Someone else who had disappeared from the 1861 Census was little William Henry Spicer. He died in 1854/2Q just after James Frederick had arrived in 1854/1Q. So what does this suggest? It must have been a traumatic upheaval for the family, but beyond that I am at a loss to know.

<sup>23</sup> 1841 Census HO 107/203 Folio 5 Page 4

<sup>24</sup> 1851 Census HO 107/1892 Folio 99 Page 2

<sup>25</sup> 1851 Census HO 107/1893 Folio 306 Page 9/10

<sup>26</sup> 1861 Census RG 09/1493 Folio 83 Page 5



So, in 1861 little had changed. Lamping was now 57 years old and had been on the light as both Assistant AND Principal for more than 20 years. Spicer was 50 and he too had been on the light for at least 15 years and possibly more, as this census confirms the suspicion that all of his children had been born at the lighthouse. As a consequence, I have no doubt that the situation at Braunton had not gone unnoticed and the Superintendent of Lights had decided that there should be a change of faces at the first opportunity. That opportunity came in the New Year 1866, but exactly when is difficult to say.

It is known that they were still together on the 1 February 1866, for someone reported this strange story to the local press and provided evidence that George Knott had not yet arrived.

*North Devon Journal*     **TURTLE ON SAUNTON SANDS**     1 February 1866

This strange visitor was supposed to have been in a vessel which must have foundered in the offing about three years since, as ever since that time there have been portions of a wreck, bottles, timber and other articles which have been washed ashore after a storm and heavy ground sea, covered with barnacles, as was the case with the turtle. The late gales, in all probability breaking up the unfortunate vessel, released the captive. Mr. Lamping had nothing to do with picking it up or finding it, but his assistant, Mr. Spicer, employed Mitchell, a fisherman, to convey it to Barnstaple in his cart.

*(Mitchell was also the ferryman and lived next to the lighthouse).*

So, what happened to Lamping and Spicer when **George Knott** was appointed to the light as its next Principal Keeper? Let the 1871 Census reveal what happened.

James Lamping had retired with his wife to a cottage in Wrafton Lane, Braunton with the curious name of Ruth Clarron Cottage.<sup>27</sup> They no longer employed a servant, but their neighbours included annuitants and master mariners and were very 'middle-class,' a situation which must have given them some satisfaction. William Spicer, on the other hand, had been moved to Pembrokeshire in South Wales, to an unusual lighthouse at Great Castle Head, but although I don't know the date that he left Braunton, I believe that he was on hand to welcome the new Principal Keeper, George Knott and his young family when they arrived.

**William Bowen** came to Braunton as George's Assistant Keeper probably in 1866-68 and he was there at the census of 1871. 'Taffy' Bowen was just a year younger than George and hailed from Solvach, as he called it, in Pembrokeshire (*Solva is on the north shore of St. Bride's Bay near St. David's and was the base used for the construction of the Smalls light from 1857 to 1861*). His wife, Martha Anderson, was born in Hakin, Pembrokeshire, now a suburb of Milford Haven and they had married in 1856/2Q in the District of Haverfordwest. All of their three children had also been born in Hakin, from 1858 and in 1861 William, Martha and young Arthur were living at 27 Hill Street, Hubberstone in Milford with William off-duty as a light keeper.<sup>28</sup> However, it was the birth-date of the youngest child that was the most indicative of their move. She was registered Margaret Elizabeth Bowen in the GRO Index for Haverfordwest in 1865/3Q. This suggests to me that her mother Margaret was living ashore with her family whilst her husband was possibly serving on the infamous Smalls Lighthouse, which was lit on the 7 August 1861. So, on balance, the evidence suggests that the arrival of two new keepers was phased over a couple of years. The light was then a very different place as it reverberated to the noise of ten children.

<sup>27</sup> 1871 Census RG 10/2189 Folio 71 Page 25

<sup>28</sup> 1861 Census RG 09/4161 Folio 10 Page 13

## The New Principal Keeper Arrives

The platform was never crowded at Instow after the train from Exeter had arrived, but George and Catherine were not alone in alighting with luggage. The train guard had called the porter over and they were busy lifting the trunks out of the baggage van while there seemed to be several men looking for passengers to ferry cross the water. They had no trouble picking out the Knott family as George Knott was wearing his best Trinity House uniform so Jimmy Mitchell and Sam Fishley<sup>29</sup> soon guessed that he was the new keeper for the Braunton Light.

Catherine had adamantly refused to travel to North Devon by ship and she had insisted that the railway was good enough and the children would not be any trouble. True to her word the family had arrived in good humour after a long day's travelling, using two trains. They had left Millbay Station early in the morning on a broad gauge train of the Bristol & Exeter Railway and had changed at Exeter to the much smaller train of the North Devon Railway.<sup>30</sup> The boys were besotted by all the movement and the steam engines of which they saw a great number and all of them had names, just like ships.

The first thing they saw at Instow was a magnificent sandy beach and as James Mitchell, the ferryman, introduced himself as their next door neighbour,<sup>31</sup> he suggested that for a small consideration the family trunks could be brought over in another boat. *Young Bill Fishley there'll bring 'em.* George drew a small handful of coins from his waistcoat pocket and selected a shiny, silver sixpence. As he passed it to the grateful waterman, George directed young Henry to help with the trunks whilst adding, *and be careful with that box. You know what's inside.* Of course it was the precious model of the Eddystone Light. So, with everyone allotted to his task, Mitchell led the Knott family the short walk to the quay. As he did so he pointed across the river estuary to the curious white lighthouse that was to be their home for the next few years. *It's right on the beach,* shouted the boys almost as one.

Catherine stepped gingerly into the small ferry. She didn't like boats, as they couldn't be relied upon to stay still. The children piled in, loving every moment of it. Mitchell pulled away from the pier on his oars and then with a single deft manoeuvre unfurled a small lug-sail and sat back at the tiller.

The tide was on the flood and it soon became obvious to George that this was a difficult estuary to navigate. Gradually the shore came closer and closer. *The tower is growing out of the top of the house,* said Frederick, the youngest boy. It certainly was and it had been like that since 1820 when it had been designed and built by Joseph Nelson.

It was well over a mile and a half to the little pier that served the residents of Braunton, but as the ferry bumped against it, Jimmy Mitchell announced, *yer ye be fer where you'm gwain.* The boys nearly collapsed laughing at the almost unintelligible North Devon accent. It had crossed Jimmy's mind to land them on the beach closer to the lighthouse, but one look at Catherine's voluminous skirts and the two tiny girls decided him against attempting that.

*'Tis only 'aff a mile along that there track,* the ferryman said. The children groaned and feigned exhaustion, but Jimmy was a kind and sensitive man. *While we'm waitin' fer t'other boat to catch us, I'll harness ol' Daisy to the cart. Dare say the childer would like a ride.* Then, with the trunks loaded and the children perched on the top, the wagon load set off. They loved it and sat silently motionless, mesmerised by their new home. Thoughts of the adventures they would have in the mysterious sand dunes, filled them with eager anticipation.

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<sup>29</sup> 1871 Census RG10/2192 Folio 51 Page 5 & *Estuary & River Ferries of the SW England* by Langley & Small Pages 37-39

<sup>30</sup> [www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North\\_Devon\\_Railway#](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Devon_Railway#)

<sup>31</sup> 1861 and 1871 censuses in the Photo Gallery for Family Knott G

## A Description of the Light

It is customary to name a light after its location, but it was not so in this case. It was sited in the parish of Braunton and it was referred to locally as the 'Braunton Light' and evidence of this is found in the censuses when George Knott and William Spicer describe the place of birth of their children as 'Braunton Light House.' However, the name officially annotated to the light was that of the hazard it guarded and in that the **BIDEFORD BAR LIGHT** becomes synonymous with a rock lighthouse, as it does for its lack of a fresh water supply.

It has already been said that the light was built in 1820 to the design of Joseph Nelson, but the beautiful drawings from the Trinity House Archive show a different structure from the one that has been photographed. There exists a reference to the light being 'altered in 1832' and significant differences can easily be seen when comparing the drawings with these modern images. Apart from the addition of a second floor to the house, a lantern replaced the single light which shone from just one of the eight faces. It is interesting to note that in that same year, 1832, Joseph Nelson built another light at Burnham-on-sea, which had a much larger Low Light built on stilts to allow the sea to pass beneath it..

The structure at Braunton was constructed entirely of an oak frame with a mast-like centre post. Like so many large wooden buildings of this period, it probably utilised the skills of the local shipwrights and boat builders and its close boarded exterior is immediately reminiscent of a clinker built dinghy. Its octagonal form emphasises the fact that building in wood precludes any thought of a circular tower, so for added strength the tower was buttressed externally by four large beams that seemed to be aligned to the cardinal points of the compass. Inside the tower there was a series of simple platforms connected by ladders ascending to the lantern room. The weather vane on the tower's cap stood 86 feet above its concrete base and the tower itself soared some 50 feet above the roof ridge of the house. However, at the 1911 census each keeper wrote on his census form that he occupied FIVE rooms. Did that mean a shared kitchen and two rooms for each family or five rooms each?

The most important feature of the lighthouse was its light. This was a fixed, white light that could be seen 14 miles distant, but it functioned as a leading light, so a second, lower light was needed with which to align it from seaward. This Low Light was 311 yards north and was built as a small, close-boarded, timber light-room 15 feet high and standing on piles, whose light could be seen at a distance of eleven miles.<sup>32</sup> Both structures survived until 1957.

However, there was one more curious function, the performance of which seemed to fall to the light keepers, although this has not been substantiated by any other documentary source.

Out in the estuary there was a tide marker consisting of a horizontal white board fixed to two posts. When the tide reached the bottom of the board, it was either half flood or half ebb tide. The keeper on duty at the High Light kept an eye on this board during the hours of daylight and when the tide was seen to be at the bottom of the board, he walked over to the Low Light where there was a large mast and ball. If the tide was at half flood he raised the ball to the top of the mast and if it was at half ebb he lowered the ball. At night this was pure guesswork as the board could not be easily seen, but neither could the ball, so it was either a red or a green light that had to be exhibited.<sup>33</sup> George & Catherine's grandson Frederick G. Knott told Ken Trethewey in an interview in the 1970's that it was this function of lighting the correct light that was carried out by Catherine.

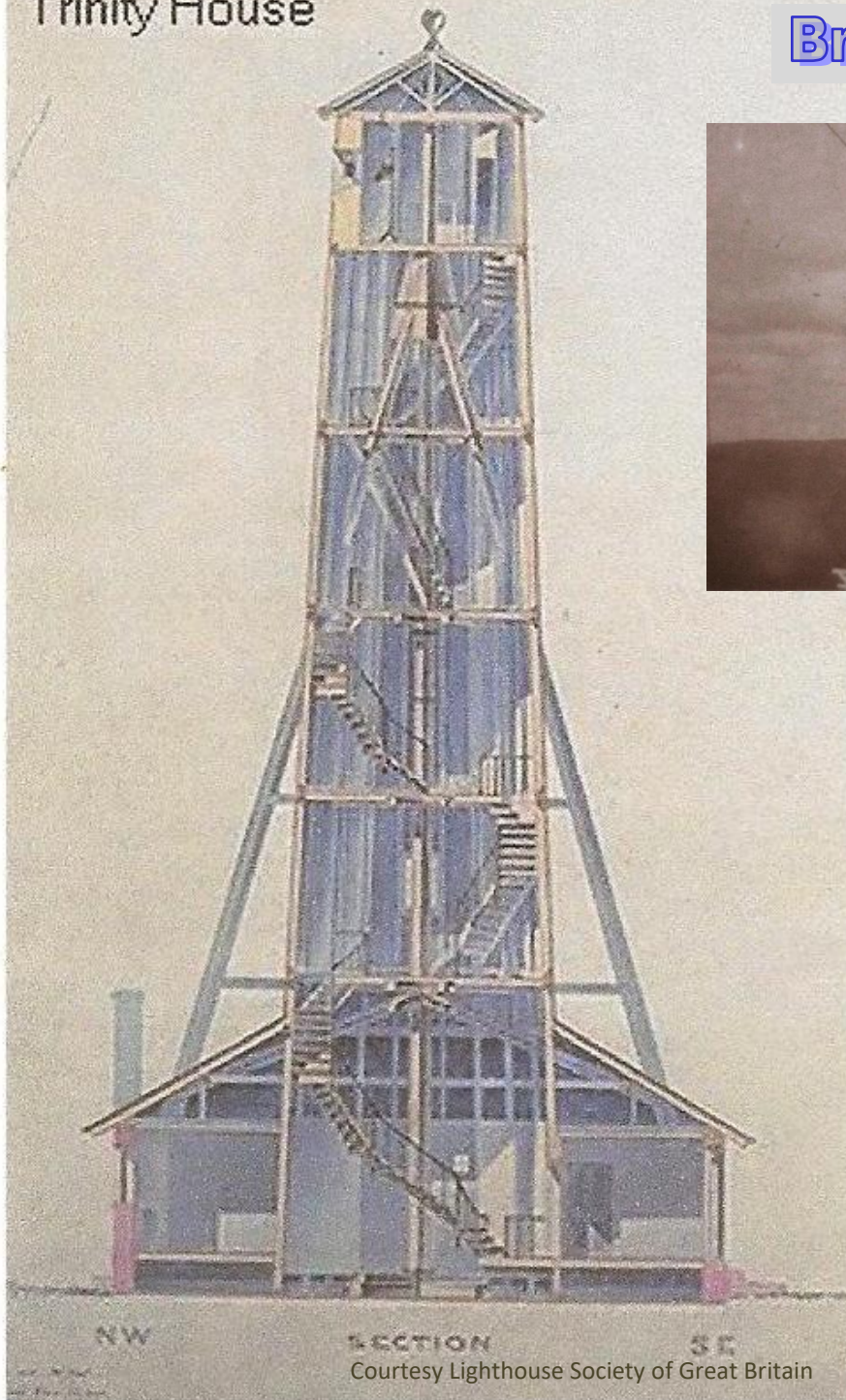
<sup>32</sup> Lighthouses and Lightships by W.H.Davenport Adams published in 1878 courtesy of the LSGB Kenneth Trethewey

<sup>33</sup> [www.exmoorencyclopedia.org.uk](http://www.exmoorencyclopedia.org.uk)

BIDDEFORD

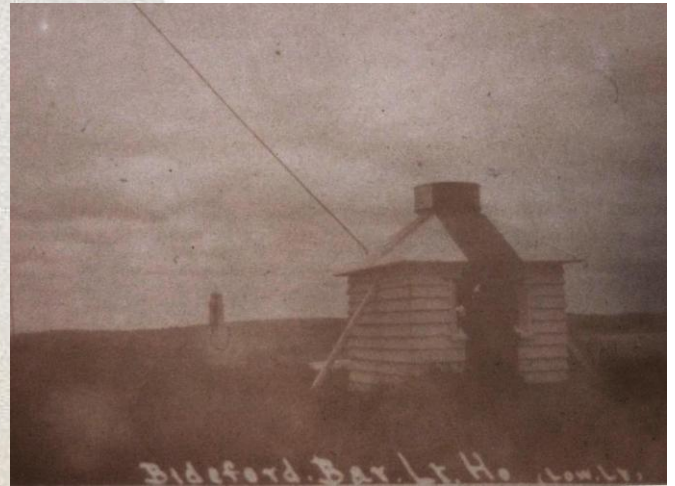
HIGH LIGHT

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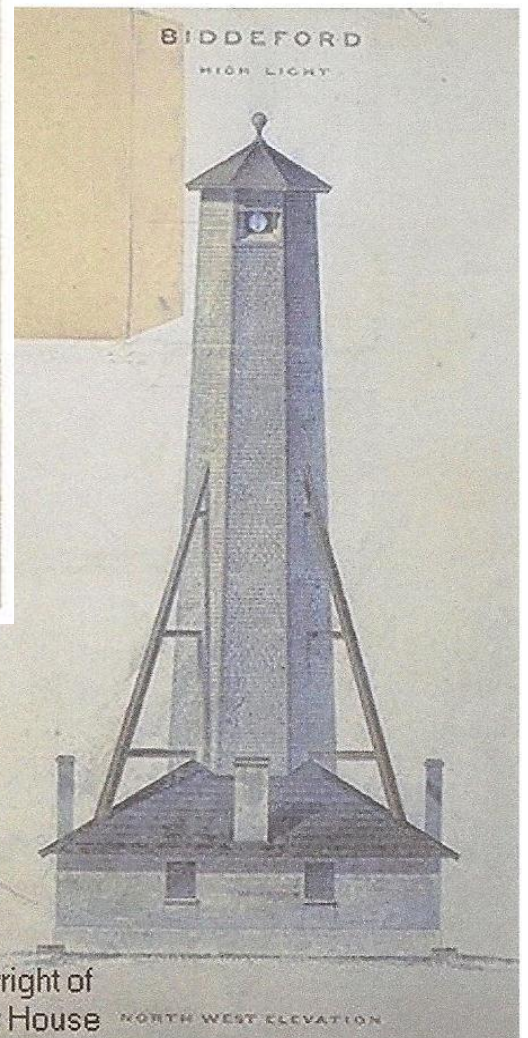
## Bideford Bar Lights

## Braunton Burrows



This is the only known image of the Low Light and shows both red stripes in line.

*Courtesy of the  
Association of Light Keepers*

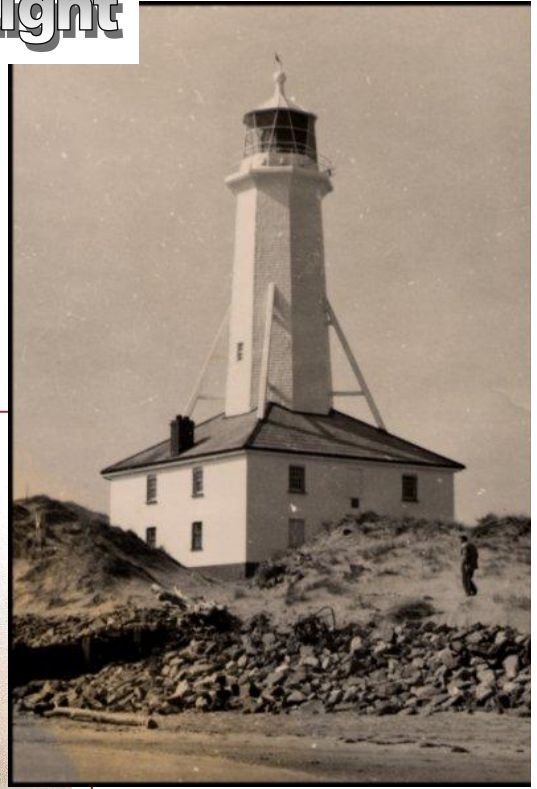
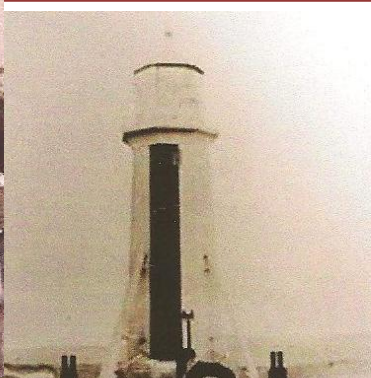
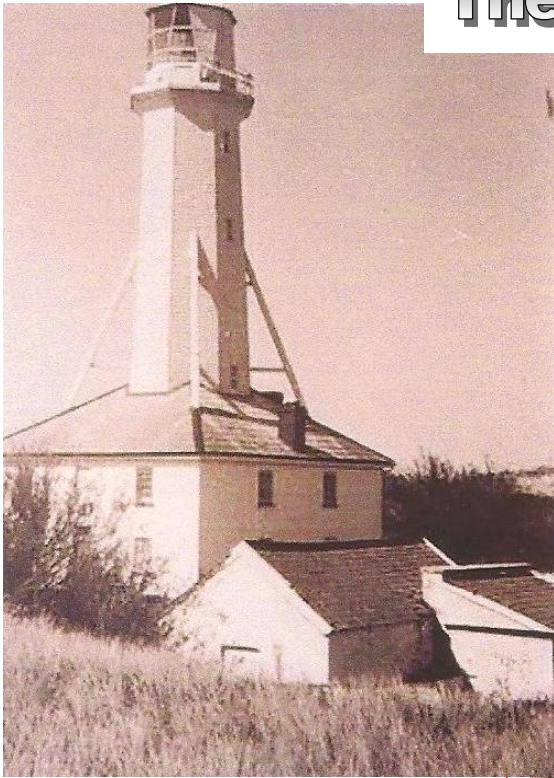


Copyright of  
Trinity House

The designer of this light - JOSEPH NELSON - served under the Trinity House Engineer Daniel Alexander and over a 20-year period was responsible for the design and build of some fifteen lighthouses. Several of them were around the Bristol Channel and included Lundy Old Light 1819; Bardsey Island, South Wales 1821; Burnham-on-sea, Somerset 1832.

However, he also designed and built the Longstone Light in the Farne Islands, Northumberland in 1826. This latter light was home to Grace Darling and her family with whom the Knott's were eventually related through the marriage of George & Catherine's eldest son Henry.

# The Braunton Light



The unique view below looks inland towards the confluence of the Taw/Torrige Rivers at low tide.

It shows three timber groins built to protect the light from the sea during westerly gales, but these are showing signs of dilapidation, unlike the Edwardian cover picture.

Unfortunately the view does not include the Bar or the Low Light.



This rare photograph probably shows light keeper Frederick HARVEY 48. He was a widower from Plymouth and his daughter Emily 20 acted as his housekeeper.

Extract from the 1911 census.

Note the wide 'red' vertical stripe which may not have been there in George Knott's time.



TAW & BARNSTAPLE

INSTOW

TORRIDGE & BIDEFORD

38295. BRAUNTON LIGHTHOUSE, FROM THE AIR.

# A Trade in Coastal Waters

George's occupation was solely to safeguard the ships that passed the lighthouse for which he was responsible, but as the keeper of the Bideford Bar Light, he could claim a personal interest in the ships that he saw each and every day. These were not ships passing in the distance from one side of the world to another. These were the ships that belonged to the communities that George knew – Braunton, Appledore, Bideford and Barnstaple.

Surprisingly, Braunton had its own port which was a substantial quay at Velator. This was at the head of the navigable section of the River Caen which was accessed just behind Crow Point on the River Taw towards Barnstaple. It was known locally as Braunton Pill, or simply 'the Pill,' but it regularly saw ships of 100 to 200 tons burthen making their way to and from the quay on the tide. As a consequence mariners and even master mariners were commonly found in the censuses for Braunton and in Wrafton Lane in 1881 there were three 'skippers' – Walter Chichester, William Cory and yes, it is correct, Francis Drake.

These regular sailing visitors were coasters and many of them dated from the 1830's and 40's, yet the trade that they brought was essential to the local community. Incoming cargoes included coal from South Wales and the Forest of Dean, corn from Bristol and Liverpool, timber from Bristol and Cardiff and limestone from Caldy Island off the Welsh coast.

The lime trade was also a significant industry in the area, essential for the farmers to use on their fields before planting. There were three lime kilns at Velator and individual kilns at many locations like Saunton, Croyde and Woolacombe. The activity surrounding a limestone cargo once the incoming ship had been spotted from East Hill was almost frenetic with carts unloading and kilns being packed for burning. A few days later when the slaked lime had to be reloaded on to the farm carts, they turned the lanes into a quagmire if the weather was bad.

The ships never travelled empty, so if they were outward bound for South Wales seeking a cargo of coal, they might carry iron ore from the Spreacombe Mines for smelting and even locally grown potatoes were gratefully received in Swansea. A trip to Gloucester for coal from the Forest of Dean would mean a cargo of china clay from Fremington, destined for Worcester. Yet there was one cargo that everyone wanted and it was also harvested locally, snatched from the old enemy – the sea.

Bideford Bar was made of sand and gravel and it was almost limitless in extent. Braunton kept a small number of barges at Velator that came out as the tide was falling to position themselves over the Bar, so that they settled upon it. Once it was safe to work, the men shovelled endlessly and apparently tirelessly into the barge until it was full. If it was not full when the tide turned, it was a race to get as much on board as possible before climbing in and waiting for the barge to be lifted off by the tide. It was a risky operation, but the raw material was welcomed by the building trade at all the major ports around the Bristol Channel.

Of course it was the weather as well as the tides that played a significant role in the life of a sailing ship. If the wind was from the wrong direction then the ships could do nothing. If the sea and the wind were in an angry mood then the ships could easily become their victims. If that should happen within sight of the lighthouse, then the keepers would be the first to know and would fire distress rockets. This would alert both the lifeboat crew at the Saunton Burrows and the crew on the other side of the estuary at Northam Burrows, yet it was curious to learn that Appledore men crewed BOTH boats. All the Braunton men could do was launch the boat from its carriage using a team of 8 to 12 horses brought from the village.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> [www.appledorelifeboat.org](http://www.appledorelifeboat.org)

## Losses and Rescues near the Bar

The following list for North Devon and Lundy is an extract from the **Shipwreck Index of the British Isles** that was published by the Lloyds Register of Shipping in 1995, which has been further sifted to list only those ships that were lost within five miles of the lighthouse.

The total represents 223 vessels lost before 1900 and the first ship on the list was the JOHANNA & MARY lost in 1735 on the Bideford Bar. There then followed a total of 33 ships lost on the Bar, 29 of which were in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and 24 of these were lost AFTER the Bideford Bar Light was lit in 1820.

The first ship on the list below was coincidentally found in the 1861 census which revealed that John Francis Organ, the Master, was born in Charlestown on 2 May 1813 and came from a seafaring family that included, Edwin, Joseph and William Organ and may have been related to Derrick Organ, a onetime colleague in the Devonport Dockyard Weapons Group. The **MERIDIAN** in 1861 had a crew of six – Richard Hooper 48 Mate from Pentewan; John Clark 27 AB from Mevagissey; John Row 34 AB from Glamorgan; David Alland 43 AB from Ipswich and Henry Bragendale 20 OS from Manchester.<sup>35</sup> It is thought that the crew survived the incident.

1864	15 Nov	Saunton Sands	MERIDIAN	John Organ
1864	17 Nov	Bideford Bar	DAVID & MARTHA	<i>Unknown</i>
1865	02 Sep	Saunton Sands	HOPE	<i>Unknown</i>
1865	02 Sep	Braunton Sands	ZOE	W. Cameron
1866	23 Feb	Bideford Bar	ALTIVO	<i>Unknown</i>
1866	21 Sep	Bideford Bar	WOOLPACKET	<i>Unknown</i>
1867	05 Jan	Bideford	MARY	<i>Unknown</i>
1867	01 Dec	Bideford	JEUNE ADELINE	Guiot
1869	03 May	Barnstaple	PRIDE of the WEST	J James
1869	12 Sep	Appledore	RELIANCE	W Bogan
1870	09 Jan	Appledore	ELIZA	<i>Unknown</i>
1872	08 Dec	Baggy Point	TINTO	N Road
1872	31 Dec	Bideford Bar	TRIAL	A Corrie
1873	10 Oct	Saunton Sands	TULIP?	W.T.Moore
1875	13 Feb	Bideford Bar	LYDNEY TRADER	George Crocombe
1877	20 Feb	Saunton Sands	MUSE	<i>Unknown</i>
1878	24 Mar	Bideford Bar	HEROINE	E Short
1878	03 Aug	Braunton Lighthouse	ANN	J Lemon
1879	20 Jul	Baggy Point	THREE BROTHERS	Thomas Harlyn
1880	24 Nov	Braunton Sands	HOPE	G.B.Vaggers
1880	27 Dec	Braunton Burrows	JANE & MARY	S Guard

The ANN, lost at the Braunton Lighthouse in 1878, was the first of two such incidents, the second coming on the 11 January 1889 when the CHARLOTTE ANN whose master was J. Hare, was lost at the same location.

Coincidentally the lifeboat housed at Braunton Burrows, near the lighthouse between 1866 and 1881 was named the *George & Catherine* and it is thought to have been the source of inspiration for George's next model.

<sup>35</sup> 1861 Census RG09/4527 Folio 131 Page 1

## Life on the Burrows 1866 - 1879

George and Catherine celebrated their return to a family lighthouse with the birth of their eighth child Herbert Joseph Knott on Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> June 1866. The men-folk were not encouraged to hang around at a time like this, neither were they wanting to be there, so it was easy enough to find a few chores that needing doing at the Low Light where they would be on hand, but well out of the way. Catherine and Martha were left to sort it out between them.

The increasing size of the Knott family must have put a considerable pressure on their living space as there may have been only **FIVE** rooms in the lighthouse<sup>36</sup> that had to be shared with the Bowen's. Catherine became pregnant and gave birth five times between 1866 and 1875 and the last child – Florence Matilda – was born when Catherine was almost 48 years of age, so she was taking an enormous risk with each child, yet they all arrived without mishap.

All children, at some point in their lives, have to spend time at school and school for the Knott children was three miles away in Braunton Village. At first glance, it would seem reasonable to think that the Knott family were very isolated in their lighthouse, but I believe that this was very far from the truth. Let's walk to the village school with the children and see who they might have met on the way, but first we have to decide which way they went.

In a sense there was only one way, the track to the Ferry House and then the riverside track that followed the west bank of the River Caen to Velator, eventually leading them along South Street to the centre of Braunton at Cross Tree. However, there were countless pathways across the dunes that would have been familiar to the locals and especially the children. These dunes were the children's playground, but the paths between them could be utilised to connect with the lane, now known as Sandy Lane, which led into Caen Street and this would have brought them into Braunton at Cross Tree. Both tracks skirted either side of an area behind the dunes that had to be treated with great respect. Braunton Marsh was a salt marsh that was criss-crossed by wet ditches and a trap for the unwise and unwary.

Parents today would be horrified at the thought of their children having to traverse such an inhospitable and potentially dangerous area unaccompanied, but in the 1870's they didn't give it a second thought. The elder children assumed responsibility for their younger siblings and in general took that responsibility quite seriously. Even the weather played its part as it was not always blue skies and gentle, warm breezes. It is certain that the children were often soaked in downpours and buffeted by gale force winds as they trekked to and from school. However, the Knott children were not alone in that trek and the number of children in the immediate vicinity in 1871 was quite surprising.

As a statistic, there were 32 children aged from 3 to 16 ready to emerge from the seventeen cottages and two houses that lined the route from the Ferry House to Velator. They were all designated '*scholars*,' and even though 3 years old seems a little young, it was far from unusual, but the older age of 16 was exceptional. In general, children would be lucky to be still at school aged 13 and in this very small census area almost all the farms employed what they described as '*farm servants*' and it was the boys that were singled out for this task. There were six of them aged between 11 and 14. These farms were around Saunton at the northern end of the Burrows where there were also about nine cottages together with Down House. These few dwellings produced another 24 children annotated as '*scholars*' who would have made their way erratically along Caen Street to go to school in Braunton.

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<sup>36</sup> 1911 Census



Meanwhile back at the lighthouse, the seven ‘lighthouse kids’ were ready to set off - Arthur 14; Frederick 11; Ann 9 and Mary 7, while Herbert, who was four, was not yet a ‘scholar’ and had to stay at home. They were joined by the three Bowen children, Arthur 13; Mary Ann 8 and Margaret who was 5 years old as they set off towards the Ferry House where they were joined by John and Frank Mitchell who were 9 and 6 years old respectively. Jimmy Mitchell, who had brought the Knotts over in his ferry boat on their arrival at the light, was now 57 and had handed the responsibility of ‘ferryman’ to his eldest son William, who was 25, while Jimmy concentrated on a bit of fishing and tending the 24 acres of land with a little help from 18 year-old Josh Pedrick. Another four children from the Hunt family joined the group at Bank House making thirteen children before they had even reached Velator.

Only nine of the seventeen cottages contained school age children and most of them came in groups of 3, 4 or 5. John Moon and George Daniel were two carpenters who each had four children and there were three agricultural labourers who had 3, 4 and 5 children and the rest of the number was made up by odd ones and twos who were living with someone other than their parents like Mary Bussler 13, who lived with her grandmother Ann Yeo and William Bussler 11 (probably a brother) who was living with his elderly parents who were finding it difficult to keep both of their children at home. In fact four of the cottages contained paupers, so it was a community that was self-sufficient, but quite poor.

By now the children had reached South Street and if all of them had joined the group, there would have been just one short of forty of them (22 boys and 17 girls) and once they had reached the point where Caen Street entered Cross Tree, they would have been joined by another twenty four, so where was this enormous group of children heading? Could it be Challoner’s School? Frederick Warner Knott always said that it was there that he went to school, but was there anywhere else? It would seem not, as the Board School was not opened until 1878.

Challoner’s School was founded in 1668 by the Vicar of Braunton the Rev. William Challoner and the building illustrated was opened in 1866 (a date stone on the right hand apex shows 1864), but there was a formidable hurdle to clear before being accepted into the school. Under the age of 7, boys were expected to join the Dame School and 2d per week was paid for each pupil, but at 7 years old he would be requested to appear before the Vicar and the two churchwardens. He was asked to read a chapter from the Bible and then to write a selection from it and to add up several lines of figures. If he was successful at this test he was invited to become a pupil of the school where he would receive a sound education with an examination at the end of each year.

This paragraph (*above*) is all that has been found concerning Challoner’s School in the mid-Victorian period and it neither adequately explains the education of the village children, especially the girls, nor accounts for the large number of children who claimed to be ‘scholars.’



Challoner’s School photographed by members of the Plymouth U3A FH Group

A long search of the 1871 census eventually located the '*Schoolmaster of the Endowed School*' which we know as Challoner's School. He was Charles Dalton a 53 year-old Irishman and his wife Mary (48) was also a schoolmistress. They lived in Church Street and much farther along the street and just the other side of the **Rising Sun Inn** was another schoolmaster called George Manning. Although only 34 he was already a widower with an 8 year-old son, but I think it reasonable to say that these two gentlemen provided the education for the boys of Braunton.

The girls of the village appeared to be catered for, not only by Mary Dalton, but also three other schoolmistresses who all seemed to be local women. They were Mary Kift (55) also of Church Street, who curiously was the wife of an agricultural labourer, whilst Elizabeth Tolley (48) lived in Wrafton Lane. Also in Wrafton Lane was Jane Woulds (52), who was running her own boarding school with the assistance of her daughter, also called Jane (25), but with only three boys and three girls living in the house. And finally Martha Atkins (28) was the daughter of a local carpenter living in North Street.

It is probable that the children's classes were very large, maybe upwards of forty strong and they were segregated, so it is inevitable that the children would make friends with 'kids' of their own age. Frederick Knott (my great grandfather) was 11 years-old and two of the children with whom he may have shared a class were John Reed (10) and William Shapland (11). They lived on either side of Saunton Warren Farm and this farm must have been an enormous curiosity, not only to them, but also to all the children of the area.

Many times I have written the word 'burrows' without a second thought to the implication of its meaning, but the farm within this area of the dunes, was one enormous rabbit warren. There were hundreds if not thousands of rabbits living within its 300 acres, managed by the Johns family and Henry Johns at 23 years of age was the 'warrener.' But this was no sentimental, child friendly farm offering a family day-out. This was an essential source of food for the village and from time to time many a cottage kitchen table would be graced by a steaming rabbit stew or rabbit pie.

At this end of the Burrows there were several large farms. East and West Saunton Farms accounted for over 320 acres and the largest farm in the district was that belonging to Buckland Manor which was nearly 600 acres, and employed 10 men and 7 boys, but there were quite a lot of less than 100 acres, yet Bideford Bar Light didn't even have a garden. This was unusual for a land lighthouse as the keepers usually relied on having some manageable ground to supplement the family groceries. Of course the lighthouse was built on pure sand and it has also been said that it didn't even have a water supply.

If this is a true statement, then Trinity House would have had to bring the water in barrels as well as restocking the lamp oil and this must have been done by boat, but where did that boat come from? The Light came under the jurisdiction of the Trinity House Depot at Neyland in South Wales which was on the north side of the Milford Haven and 60 miles North West of the Bideford Bar and during the period 1865-79 there were two steam paddle schooners acting as tenders. The VESTAL was very large at 342 tons and the BEACON was just 80 tons lighter, so both would have found Velator inaccessible. It seems likely, therefore, that Trinity House had placed a contract with an Appledore man to supply the lighthouse with its needs.

So, the story has now turned a full circle and has returned to the sea and its ships and it is across the water in Appledore that we must look for the next part of the family story.

## Appledore, Shipyards and Marriage

Soon after arriving at the Braunton Light, Henry reached his 15<sup>th</sup> birthday in August 1866 and it seems unlikely, therefore, that he ever went to school in Braunton. Instead he crossed the water to Appledore, on the other side of the estuary, where he was apprenticed as a ship's carpenter in a local shipyard. There was a distinct difference between that trade and the trades of a shipwright and a boatbuilder and all three were present among Appledore's population of 2206 in 1871. A boatbuilder would have been involved with small boats, like dinghies and cutters, whilst a shipwright would have been more concerned with the building of the hulls of much larger ketches and schooners. A ship's carpenter, on the other hand, was much more likely to have been employed on repairs to the vessel and its interior furniture and fittings.

So, what shipyards were there in Appledore? One source<sup>37</sup> lists just three shipbuilders for 1878 and these are easily found in the 1871 census, but only two of them declared that they were 'shipbuilders.' Robert Cock was 34 years old and lived on 'The Quay' and he recorded that he employed 28 men and 2 boys. Ship repair was the mainstay of this business which had been founded in the mid-1850's although he did occasionally build a new vessel,<sup>38</sup> so perhaps it is here that we should look for Henry Knott. Robert Cocks's larger and grander competitor was Alfred Cook, who was also 34, but he lived among Appledore's maritime middle-class on Marine Parade as an employer of 53 men and 7 boys. Also on Marine Parade lived the third 'shipbuilder' who did not admit to that profession or to employing any men, but William Pickard was important to the local community as a ship owner,<sup>39</sup> and Marine Parade overlooked Appledore's unique and indispensable facility, the Richmond Dry Dock.

Veering away to the south from the head of the dock was New Quay which comprised of nineteen dwellings including the '**The Ship**'- at its lower end - and '**The Bell**,' both public houses. About halfway along and next to Joannah Arnold's shop lived a sailor's wife called Ann Harding with her three young boys, the youngest being only 10 months old. Her husband was away at sea yet she had a spare room for two lodgers - Henry and George Knott. In the next house to them was Captain William Western whose wife Elizabeth had two young daughters. However, their family enjoyed the luxury of a live-in servant girl, Jane Ford, who was only 13 years old. This terrace of cottages looked out over the shipyard that served the dock and its deserted remains, including two slips, can still be seen today.

There were five ship's carpenters on the quay and scrolling randomly through the 85 pages that made up the census for Appledore, it can be seen that this was the majority trade. Shipwrights were very scarce. It is also noticeable that the word 'apprentice' rarely appears and therefore it is unclear whether or not Henry had finished his apprenticeship. It was the same for George Knott. At 16 years old, he was described as a '*sailmaker*,' and further along the quay Arthur Mitchell was also a '*sailmaker*' in spite of being only 15 years old, yet they must have been apprenticed to a master, but who might that have been?

Ishla Street and Bude Street were probably Appledore's most populous streets and although I have not searched every page, two sailmakers were found in Bude Street. Sam Mathews was a Greenwich Pensioner, so he had learnt his trade in the tough school of the Royal Navy and he employed 3 boys, whilst a neighbour, John Popham was a '*sailmaker and ship owner*' but not admitting to being an employer. John Fishwick was 68 and he owned a ship chandler's shop on The Quay that was run by his unmarried daughter Ellen. However, somewhere he had a loft in which 2 men and 2 boys were employed.<sup>40</sup>

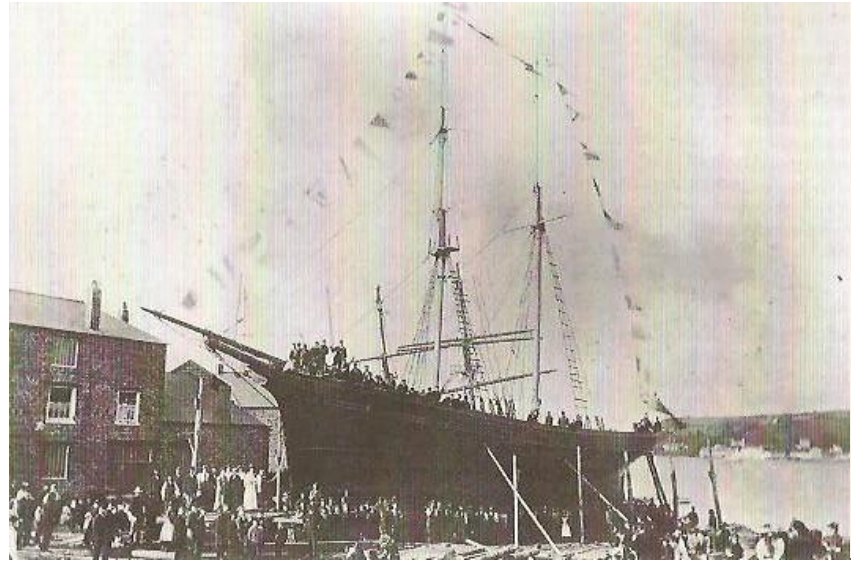
<sup>37</sup> The New Maritime History of Devon Volume 2 Chapter 7 Page 86

<sup>38</sup> The New Maritime History of Devon Volume 2 Chapter 7 Page 84

<sup>39</sup> 1871 Census RG10/2203 – Folio 30 Page 30; Folio 29 Pages 27 and 28 respectively

<sup>40</sup> 1871 Census RG10/2203 – Folio 36 Page 3; Folio 35 Page 1 and Folio 30 Page 31 respectively

# Appledore and the Richmond Dry Dock



## NOTES

The buildings in the photograph of The Quay (top) are still there today including the shop premises and the possibility that it might have been John Fishwick's chandlers shop and sail loft.

The smack, *Rosamond Jane*, was built in Padstow in 1834 and she was the last ship to trade with Hartland Quay.

The brigantine *Clio* is seen here on the Slip at New Quay in 1894. She has just been completed by Robert Cock & Son for a Bristol owner and is about to be launched to join the Newfoundland trade.

However in any writing about Appledore there is one dominant name that must be mentioned and that name was William Yeo. He was the eldest son of James Yeo who had become a powerful influence in the Colonial Government of Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland. He had almost total control over the timber and shipbuilding on the island and during the drive for ever more expansion and profit, he sent his son William back to Appledore as his Agent and between them they built up an impressive international business. In due course William Yeo built Appledore's Richmond Dry Dock, opened in 1856, and gradually acquired control of most of the local ship building capacity.

Father and son then evolved a most unusual practise for the period in that they built ships on Prince Edward Island very cheaply, but unfinished. They were then sailed across the North Atlantic to Appledore, often with incomplete deck houses, fittings or even limited rigging without top-masts and yards, for completion in the Richmond Dry Dock. The ships were then either sold immediately or following a few passages under Yeo's ownership, when the tonnage prices were high. It was no surprise, therefore, to find him at Richmond House, a large mansion designed to overshadow those of the local gentry, in the census of 1871 in which William Yeo refers to himself as a '*merchant and landowner.*' Although William died prematurely in 1872 just four years after his father James, the family's activities were spread over 60 years from 1833 to 1893 and during that time 350 ships passed through their hands with more than 250 of them being sold to British owners soon after their arrival in North Devon. In 1865, the year that the Knotts arrived in Braunton, no less than 18 of these ships were sold in that single year, three times the normal average.

1872 was also the year in which George and Catherine's third son, Arthur, celebrated his 15<sup>th</sup> birthday by joining his brothers in Appledore to learn the trade of a shipwright and whilst Arthur was just beginning an apprenticeship, Henry was completing his time and wondering what he should do next. There was no shortage of work on the scores of ships that came through Appledore, but gradually Henry began to realise that he was drawn to the Trinity House Service to be a light keeper like his father and grandfather before him.

It has been suggested on good authority that it was 1875 when Henry found lodgings in Holyhead for his first appointment as an Assistant Light Keeper and his first station was the Skerries,<sup>41</sup> off the coast of Anglesey. However Henry was still unattached whilst Appledore provided more than a trade for the other two boys. It was inevitable that one of them would meet a local girl and be sufficiently smitten by her to want to marry her and raise a family, but it was not one, but both of the remaining boys who married local girls and the first to walk the aisle was George.

Georgina SKINNER had been born in Appledore at the beginning of 1856 to George and Elizabeth (née Johns) who had married in 1853/3Q in the Bideford District, but probably in Appledore. George Skinner was born in Instow on the 27<sup>th</sup> February 1831 and he was issued with his mariner's ticket as an Ordinary Seaman at Bideford on the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1850. On the 20<sup>th</sup> April 1855 he joined the *RESEARCH* of Prince Edward Island and on the 29<sup>th</sup> December 1855 he was lost overboard. Three weeks later, his widow was paid his wages of £9-7s-4d at Bideford. Elizabeth remained unmarried and in 1871 she still lived in Irsha Street where she had been ten years before, but she had overcome her tragedy and was now a schoolmistress. Her daughter Georgina was living three doors away as a domestic servant to an elderly retired coast guard called Terrance Merriman who had three young grandchildren in the house along with his wife.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> *They All Lived in Lighthouses* by Elizabeth Roberts Page 25 – where she continues the story of Henry – her grandfather.

<sup>42</sup> 1861 Census RG09/1503 Folio 121 Page 11 and 1871 Census RG10/2203 Folio 65 Page 21

George John Knott and Georgina (she preferred to be called Georgiana) were married in Appledore's Northam Parish Church on Monday 17 July 1876 by the vicar without any of their parents witnessing the Marriage Register. This was almost certainly because Georgina was already pregnant and Frederick George Knott was born on xxxx and registered at Bideford towards the end of the year (1876/4Q).

This situation probably led to George's decision to join Her Majesty's Customs and Excise Service and that would restore their respectability and take them away from the close knit community in North Devon. So by 1881 it is no surprise to find them in Rotherhithe and living on Raymouth Road, a road that was not only fairly new, but also close to the Surrey Docks where George would have worked. It was also close to 246 Old Kent Road where this photograph was taken in the studio of F.W.Evans in about 1882/3



In the late summer of 1879 the third brother, Arthur William Knott married Dorothy Vown TUCKER, another Appledore girl. Arthur would have been 22 years of age and a fully indentured shipwright, so it should have been 'plain sailing' to marry a local girl and settle down to a life with ships. However, life has a habit of not working out quite as expected.

Dorothy was born in the last quarter of 1853 in Appledore and registered in Bideford as Dorothy Tucker, the seventh child of Rosina (née FOUND) and William Tucker. William was a mariner and in both 1861 and 1871 he was away at sea. In 1861, when Rosina had no less than TEN children at home with her elderly father, they were all living in Bude Street and Dorothy's eldest brother William was apprenticed as a sailmaker. By 1871, the family had moved to 8 Alpha Place and Dorothy was the eldest of the last four children remaining at home. However, her father William Tucker had worked conscientiously towards and finally achieved his Master's ticket, so he was no only away, but also in command of his own ship.<sup>43</sup>

Dorothy's eldest sister Mary Howell Tucker married an Appledore sailmaker called William Jones Edwards in the summer of 1862 and about 1867 they moved to Swansea where William continued to work for the rest of his life as a sailmaker. So it was with this family of eight children that we find Arthur and Dorothy Knott in 1881. Why they needed to leave Appledore is unclear, but his brother-in-law must have helped to find him work as a shipwright in the local shipyards and it is here that I leave the story with one final thought. We have seen several links with the trade of sailmaker, but Arthur's story is now about to coincide with another thread – HM Customs & Excise.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup> 1861 Census RG09/1503 Folio 95 Page 2 AND 1871 Census RG10/2203 Folio 20 Page 10

<sup>44</sup> For more information on the families of George and Arthur Knott see appropriate census sheet 1881-1911

## The Keepers of Braunton's Light - A Last Word

Before George and Catherine leave the Braunton Light behind and head for the cliff top at Bull Point, I want to raise one issue that has so far not been adequately addressed in my story and that concerns Catherine Knott and her role as a female Assistant Keeper.

When William Spicer moved to the Great Castle Head on the north shore of Milford Haven, it represented a pertinent example of a small handful of lights that were kept by a husband and wife. It was a leading light, five miles west of the town and on the road to St. Ishmaels. It is perched right on the cliff edge, but had ample accommodation for one grown up family. It was ideal for the Spicer's. Elizabeth was recorded in 1871 as the Assistant Keeper to her husband. Their youngest son James was also an assistant light keeper (part-time), but he also worked as a clerk. His older brother John was a carpenter & joiner and his eldest sister Mary was a dressmaker and all three children are recorded as being born on the Braunton Light.<sup>45</sup>

Braunton Light was defined as a two-man station and throughout the period I have investigated, two men were always there with their families. The work at the light was easily covered by these two men, yet there was one added complication. The local mariners needed to know the depth of water over the Bar and this odd function, peculiar only to Braunton, fell to the light keepers.

However, there has always been the suggestion that Catherine was employed by Trinity House, but currently I have found no written evidence to support that family tradition, yet the general practice did exist and that is why I draw attention to Elizabeth Spicer officially recorded as an 'Assistant Light Keeper' to her husband William at Great Castle Head, but there were other similar stations.

If Catherine had been officially employed then how did she cope? For ten years from 1865, she had a child every two years. Her days and nights were disrupted already without the added responsibility of keeping watch in the lantern room of the High Light or trekking across the Burrows in any weather to light the tide lights or tend the Low Light, yet that is what she is alleged to have done. So, the often repeated statement that Catherine had been the '*last woman light keeper in the Trinity House Service*' has to be viewed sceptically. I am quite content not only to record the folklore, but also to believe that she did the work of an Assistant Keeper, but she was not the last to do so!

When William Bowen came to Braunton as George's Assistant in about 1867/8, he was noted there in 1871, but how long did he stay? As an ALK he would have expected an appointment to one more station before promotion to Principal Keeper with a spell on a rock light. On that basis he might have left in 1873/4. It was no surprise therefore to see in 1881 that he had achieved his promotion, finished his duty on a rock and was now in charge of **Trevoise Head Light** on the North Cornish Coast.<sup>46</sup>

I highlight this simply because it is difficult to say who worked with George throughout the 1870's. I have spoken already about William Spicer at Great Castle Head Light, but at sometime during the 70's his older son **John Benjamin Spicer** also joined Trinity House. In 1874/3Q John married Elizabeth Barter in Poplar, which was close to the Trinity House Wharf where the new keepers were trained and in 1878 the couple had a son at Neyland in Pembrokeshire where the Trinity House Depot that serviced the North Devon lights was situated. In May 1880, they had another son, named John Perryman Spicer, at the Bideford Bar Light, where John senior had also been born, so is it reasonable to suggest that the family were at Braunton before George Knott left the light for Bull point?

Of course, George was the Principal Keeper, so who was his relief? The 1881 census reveals that it was **Edward Roberts** a Norfolk-man who at 64 years of age was nearing the end of his career and this was probably his last appointment.<sup>47</sup> In 1871 he was the Principal Keeper of the Start Point Lighthouse in South Devon, living on his own as his wife was away, but his Assistant was none other than Joseph Steer, onetime assistant on the Eddystone Light to George Knott.<sup>48</sup>

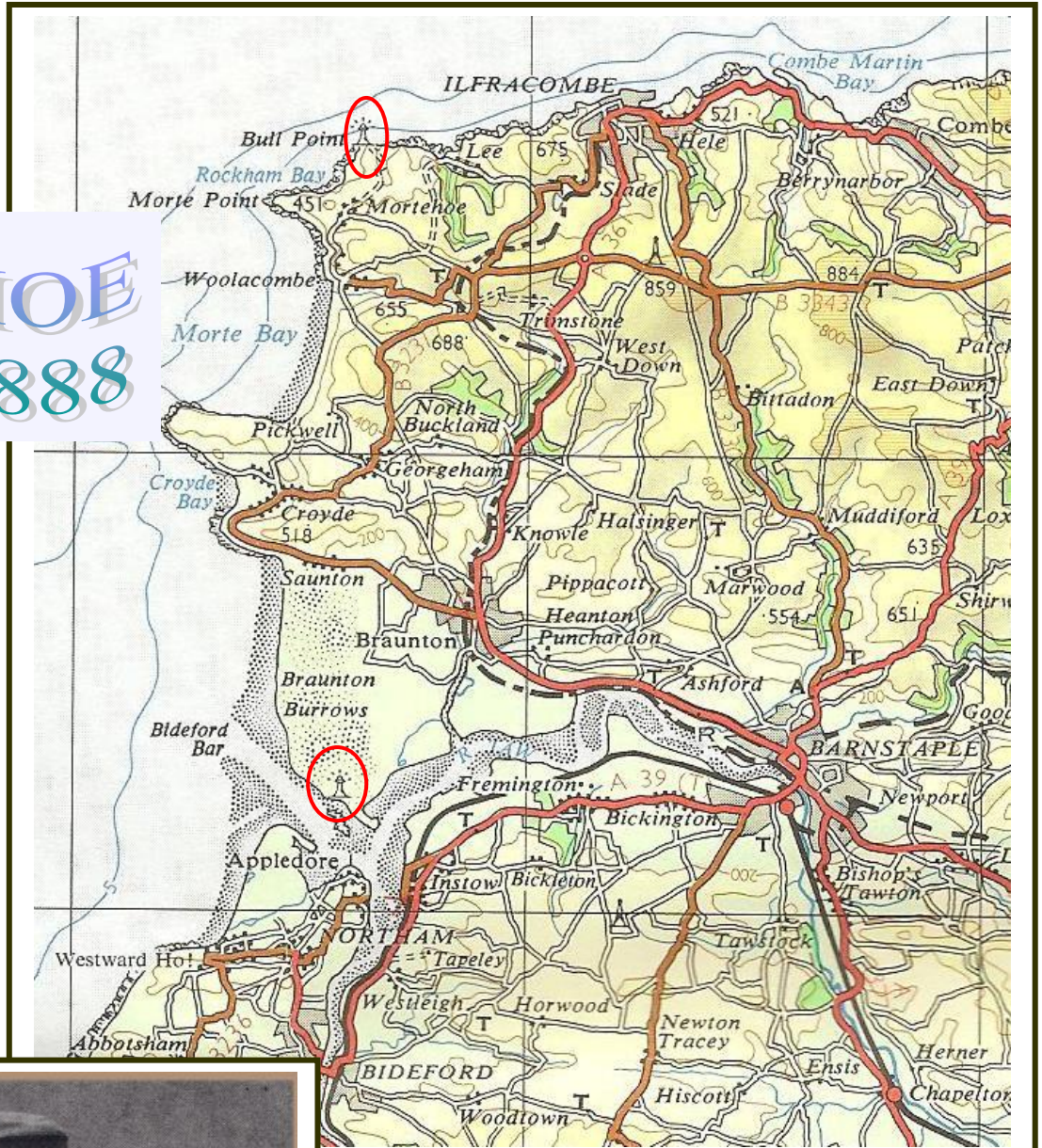
<sup>45</sup> 1871 Census RG 10/5523 Folio 60 Page 5

<sup>46</sup> 1881 Census RG11/2294 Folio 70 Page ?

<sup>47</sup> 1881 Census RG11/2249 Folio 85 Page 7 shows both John Spicer & Edward Roberts

<sup>48</sup> 1871 Census RG10/2100 Folio ?? Page 14

# MORTHOE 1879 - 1888



## BULL POINT LIGHTHOUSE

- 1 - Leaving Braunton
- 2 - Why the Light was built
- 3 - What was the light like?
- 4 - Keepers at the Light
- 5 - Life at Morthoe
- 6 - Model Photographers
- 7 - Accident at the Light
- 8 - Testimonials
- 9 - Drama and Rescue
- 10 - Fog and its effects

*What Happened Next?*





1 It was a different family that left the Braunton Light with George and Catherine on that June day in 1879, thirteen years after they had arrived. There were now five children and Herbert was the eldest at thirteen whilst little Florence was only four years old.

George had persuaded George Gammon, the village carrier,<sup>49</sup> to come down to the lighthouse to collect the family with their trunks, but he only agreed to do it on condition that he could be back at the *London Inn* at Cross Tree by 9 o'clock in the morning for his daily trip into Barnstaple. The silver florin that George Knott offered clinched the deal, so it would be an early start for Catherine and the children on the appointed day.

George had hoped that he could get the first down train of the day that left Braunton at 9.22 a.m. and when he thought about it George could see Gammon's dilemma. Potentially the coming of the railway, five years before in 1874, had eliminated all the carrier's passengers, but the timing of the first two trains into Barnstaple were at 7 a.m. and 10.38 a.m. which wasn't convenient for everyone.<sup>50</sup> So Gammon's van continued to offer a valuable service.

Although it took only twenty minutes for the train to travel the six miles to Morthoe,<sup>51</sup> it was a long, hard climb uphill that created much noise and smoke from the engine and the boys were looking forward to their short ride behind one of the locomotives with which they had become familiar. In fact it had become a favourite pastime during their holidays to go over to the railway near Wrafton to see the occasional train pass by, but it was only Herbert that could remember seeing the celebrations when the line opened on Monday 20<sup>th</sup> July 1874. There were only three engines on the line - 282, 283 and 284 - and each had six-coupled wheels and a tiny tender. They were known as the 'Ilfracombe Goods' and so the boys were watching to see which one of them would pull their train to their new home.

Everyone in the village knew that a new lighthouse was being built at Bull Point and the word soon got around that George Knott was to be its first Principal Keeper. It was no surprise therefore to see Thomas Ridge the Braunton Stationmaster<sup>52</sup> on the platform to greet George and Catherine as their trunks trundled along behind them on a station trolley. Even Thomas's wife Sarah put in an appearance to say 'farewell' to Catherine and the children.

Of course it wasn't long before the two women began exchanging news about their respective families and Sarah was surprised to learn that Catherine already had her first grandchild born in Appledore. *Goodness me*, she exclaimed, *and little Florence still only four years old*. Catherine continued that she was no longer concerned about the eldest boys, but it was Ann and Mary Jane that were most in her thoughts. *Mary's a good girl, but she can be so wilful. I hope she'll be alright in Wrafton Lane with Mrs. Woulds and her daughter*. Miss Jane Woulds was one of Braunton's school teachers and she had run a small private school with her mother for a number of years, but Mary Knott had probably not been one of her pupils.

As the two men stood chatting, resplendent in their best uniforms, Catherine's conversation with Sarah was cut short by the shrill blast of the whistle of the approaching train as the great level crossing gates behind them staggered across Caen Street to await the departure of the train for Ilfracombe.

*You said it would be 282 and it wasn't* chided Edmund, digging an elbow into Walter's side. *I didn't say that*, Walter replied indignantly. *How could I know which one it would be?*

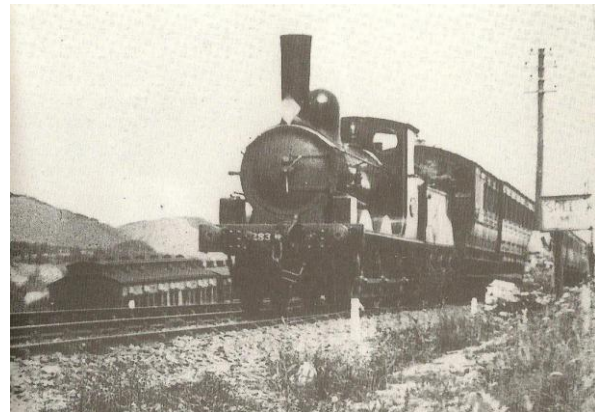
<sup>49</sup> 1881 Census RG11/2249 Folio 67 Page 10. He was 59 and lived in Heanton Street.

<sup>50</sup> Train times from the LSWR August 1874 Timetable - *The Barnstaple & Ilfracombe Railway* by Colin Maggs page 74

<sup>51</sup> This spelling was used on the station until 13 May 1902 - *The Barnstaple & Ilfracombe Railway* by Colin Maggs page 34

<sup>52</sup> 1881 Census RG11/2249 Folio 67 Page 9. He was 48.

Eighteen miles per hour was not the fastest railway journey the Knott boys had ever had, but they jostled each other for a place at the open window as the locomotive strained to lift its four coach train with a brake van at either end, up the continuous incline to the station at Morthoe, 600 feet above sea level. It only took twenty minutes and it was not the first time that they had ridden the line, but they had never left the train at Morthoe before. John Rice, the station master, was there to greet George and Catherine. Unlike the trains, word travels fast in these parts and their arrival was expected, but they were the only passengers to get off the train so early in the morning.



L&SWR Ilfracombe Goods loco 283 leaves Ilfracombe c1907



Morthoe Station and signal box looking north c1907

As George shook hands with John Rice he remembered the news just after the opening of the line when the station was found to be ablaze and it was only the swift and fearless action of the station master and his wife that prevented the flames from destroying their new home, in spite of laying waste to the booking office, waiting room, telegraph office and porters' room AND burning all the tickets<sup>53</sup>

John Rice said, *It's good to have you here*, and continued, *Folland, one of my porters, will see your trunks safely to the lighthouse. There won't be another train down for three hours<sup>54</sup> and it'll give the old 'horse somethin' to do. 'Ee knows 'is way to the light as ee's bin there ofen enough with loads fer the builders. There's a carriage outside the station for your wife and children, but first you must come and meet my wife Eliza. My three can take the children into the booking office and Johnny Keft can show them the tickets.*

It was a mile and a half to the tiny village clustered around the parish church and the *Chichester Arms*, the two most important buildings in the area, and it was another mile and a half northwards to the lighthouse, passing North Morte Farm. Beyond the farm the road was new as it had been constructed for the sole purpose of serving the lighthouse. It meandered across windswept heath land with magnificent views across the Bristol Channel to Wales.

As the carriage eased gently down the last few yards through a cutting in the rock to the light's gateway, the walled enclosure looked quite large. The boys saw it differently. Fearing that they would be confined within the white walls, they chanted, *where's the beach?*

Catherine couldn't wait to see inside the lovely new 'bungalow' and as she looked across the courtyard to the light tower she said, *and I won't have you under my feet any more. When you're on duty you can stay over there.* George's face broke into a smile, *but you'll have to come to the gallery sometimes to look at that view. Have you ever seen anything like it?*

<sup>53</sup> *The Barnstaple & Ilfracombe Railway* by Colin Maggs page 24. The incident happened on 13 August 1874

<sup>54</sup> Only one train set worked the single line in August 1874. The 0942 at Morthoe worked back to Barnstaple at 1021 and didn't leave Barnstaple again until 1208 arriving at Morthoe at 1253.

**2** In August 1858 a Royal Commission was appointed by Parliament to enquire into the burgeoning losses of ships and lives around the coasts of Britain during 1852 to 1857 when 4680 lives had been lost. In the Bristol Channel alone during the single year 1856-57 there were 187 marine casualties with the loss of 114 lives.

The Commission arrived in Bideford to take evidence on the 29 September 1858 with very little warning, but they soon selected witnesses from among the most influential characters of the maritime community. William Yeo was an obvious choice of respected and reliable information, but they also called Captain Joshua Williams of Appledore with forty years in command before coming ashore as a ship-owner, John Dunsford with thirty eight years experience with smaller craft in the Mediterranean trade, Richard Yeo a Bideford master of coasting vessels for thirty years and finally Joseph Cox a local pilot.

There emerged from the Commission's report a very detailed picture of the practices and problems of ship handling out of North Devon ports, but their conclusion did not highlight the locally held belief that there was a lack of safe havens and anchorages. Instead they concluded that *'the losses occur in general among the comparatively inferior vessels frequenting the coasts.'*<sup>55</sup>

This conclusion found little agreement around the North Devon ports and when the Trinity House decided to build the new lighthouse at Bull Point, ignoring the advice of the Bristol Channel Pilots to site the proposed lighthouse at Morte Point, there were many who shook their heads in quiet disbelief at the intransigence and stupidity of 'the authorities.'<sup>56</sup>

Of course the local mariners not only had the experience, but also long memories and they appeared to have been proved right when 29 mishaps were recorded for Morte Bay and Morte Point in the period 1850-1896 whilst at Bull Point there were only 12 incidents and all but two of them occurred AFTER the light had been lit.

The local concern was focused upon the Morte Stone which was a series of jagged ridges extending out from the point. This incident occurred on the morning of 16 September 1936 when the Swedish built, Braunton owned ketch DIDOC made an uncharacteristic error of judgement when cutting inside the outer reefs in hazy weather.



Fortunately she floated off on the high tide and no harm was done to the vessel or her crew. Others were not so lucky.

<sup>55</sup> *The New Maritime History of Devon* volume 2 page 17

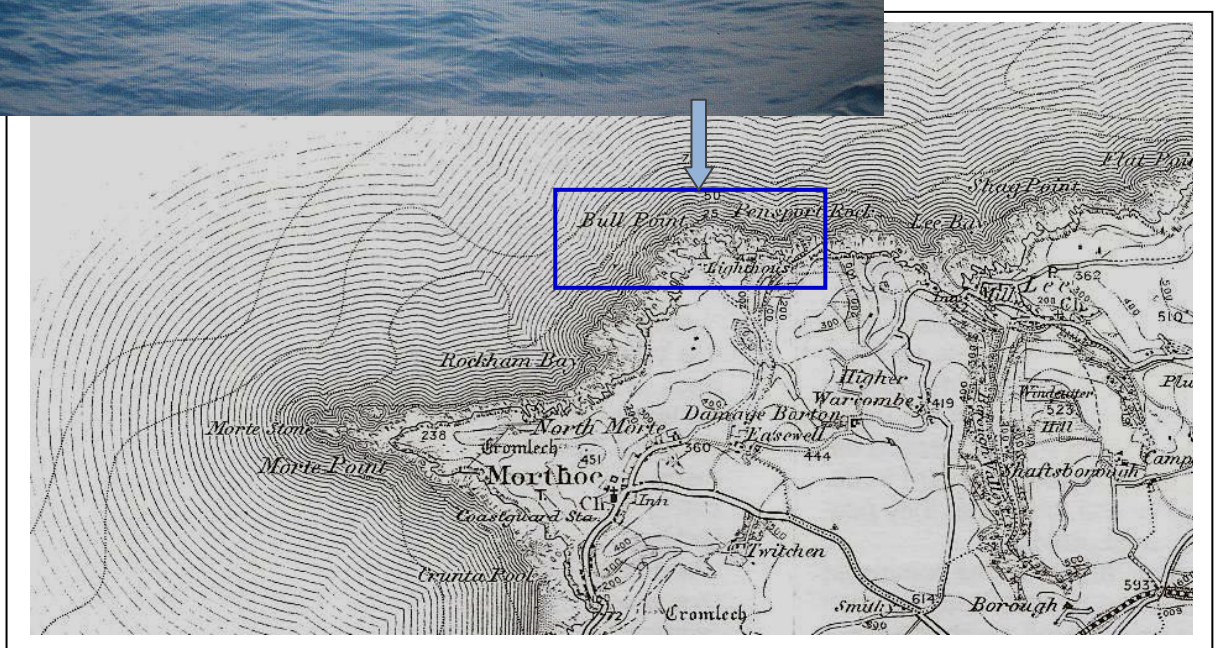
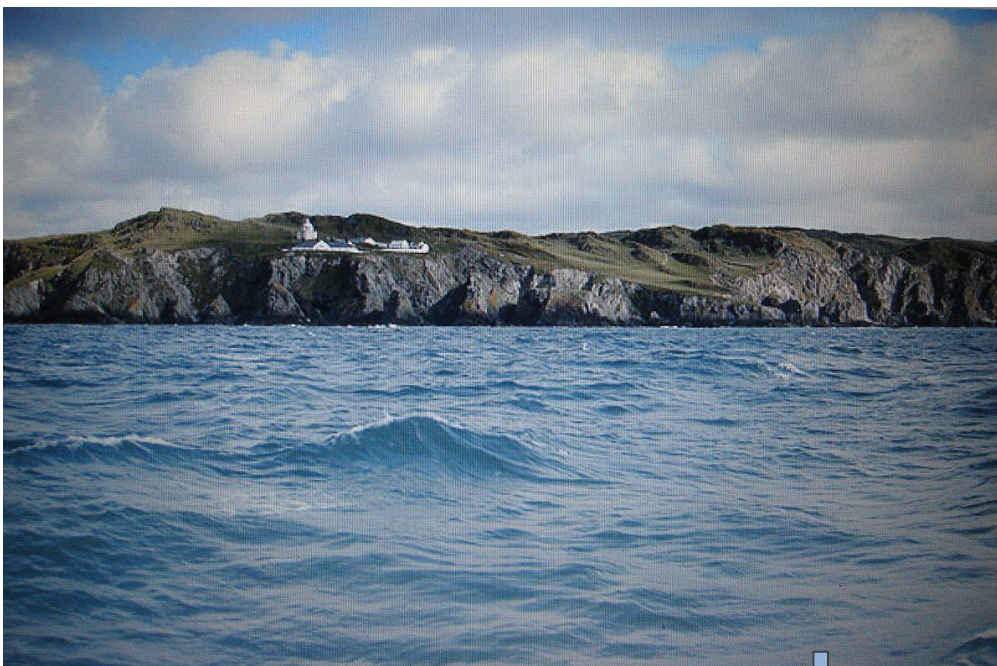
<sup>56</sup> *Two Villages, the Story of Morte and Woolacombe* by R.F. Bidgood

The following list for North Devon and Lundy is an extract from the **Shipwreck Index of the British Isles** that was published by the Lloyds Register of Shipping in 1995, which has been further sifted to list only those ships that were lost close to the lighthouse during the last two decades of the century.

1881	26 Mar	Bull Point	PELTON	W Gidney
1883	06 Feb	Bull Point	WILLIAM	J Guy
1883	30 Jul	Bull Point	MARQUIS of LORNE	Unknown
1884	16 Mar	Bull Point	MARY BOYNS	Unknown
1889	30 Jul	Bull Point	T.G.V.	Unknown
1889	21 Aug	Bull Point	THETES	W Tucker
1889	29 Sep	Bull Point	ZEPHYR	J Bennet
1891	19 Mar	Bull Point	ISLANDER	J Blampied
1894	07 Aug	Bull Point	BRISK	W Screech
1896	03 Oct	Bull Point	TRE SOSTRE	J O C Pederson

Just 12 ships were listed as lost at Bull Point, two of which occurred in 1816 and 1869, prior to the establishment of the light, and only four during George Knott's time on station.

Perhaps this underlines the local misgivings about the location of the lighthouse.



3 There were no celebrations to mark the lighting of the new lighthouse, at least nothing was reported in the local press. This lack of characteristic Victorian pomp is unusual and may have had something to do with the controversy that surrounded the location of the light. The absence of any report of this event has reverberated down the years as all publications simply state '1879' for its entry into service.

The Admiralty's Notice to Mariners was and still is the authoritative source of all changes to the lights and buoys around our coast, but even these fail to give a specific date. Notice No.4 dated 7<sup>th</sup> January 1879 opens the year by stating that there are to be '*intended lights and fog signal at Bull Point from the summer of 1879.*' On the 16<sup>th</sup> May 1879 Notice No.72 Part 3 published the fact that the '*Trinity House gives further notice that on the 30<sup>th</sup> June (the lighthouse being nearly completed) the light will be exhibited.*' It went on to state that after that date alterations would be made to the Bideford High Light, but it was left to the **Cornishman** dated Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> May to announce Trinity House's intention that

*the Bull Point Lighthouse will shew on and after the 30<sup>th</sup> June, from sunset to sunrise, at an elevation of 154 feet above HWM, a powerful white, triple-flashing light, in three successive flashes of about 2 seconds duration, divided by eclipses of about 3 seconds, the third flash being followed by an eclipse of about 18 seconds. Eighteen feet below there will be a red, fixed light to mark Morte Stone. A powerful fog signal will also be established giving three blasts in quick succession every two minutes.*

The light was built to the design of Sir James Nicholas Douglass on a plateau that extends out into the sea and the structure cost £7000 to build. The light, within its 55 feet high tower, was 154 feet above the average high water mark (HWM) and on the 21<sup>st</sup> July 1879 Trinity House confirmed in its Notice No. 106 Part 1 that *the Bull Point Light is exhibited.*



George & Catherine are pictured here in front of Bull Point Light not long after its commissioning.

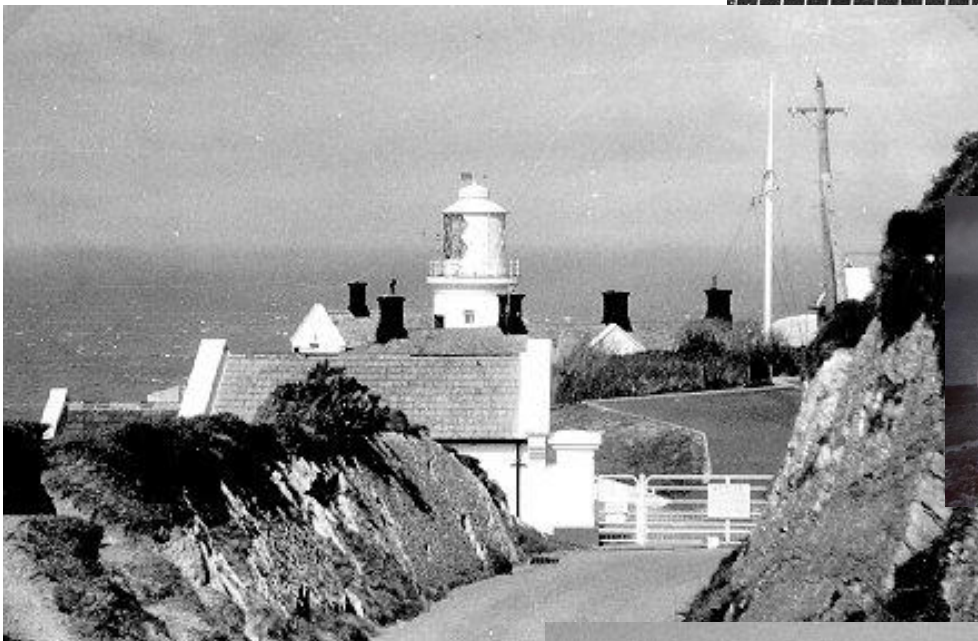
## BULL POINT LIGHTHOUSE

Ken Trethewey (Great Great Grandson) visited the station in 1966 and captured the following three images all from the same western side of the site.

The courtyard scene from the previous page featuring George & Catherine Knott outside the main entrance to the newly completed light is reproduced on the right

The view was taken from between the keepers' bungalow on the right and the fog signal engine house on the left and a slightly different angle is shown below.

The entrance through the little rock cutting has barely changed in 70 years except that the thumbnail picture of a pony and trap coming through the gateway shows that one pillar has been removed



*George Knott*



**4** Bull Point was a three-man station and it was nearly two years after the commissioning of the light before the 1881 census provides the first opportunity to learn who was working with George Knott as his Assistant Keepers.

**James Edward TROTH** was a Hampshire man born in Gosport in 1841 (GRO Index for Alverstoke 1841/4Q) and he had married Mary Louisa CARPENTER from Hurst Castle, Hampshire in the Tendring District of Essex in 1868/4Q.<sup>57</sup> The 1871 census finds both of them living at the dramatically located South Stack lighthouse close to Holyhead in Anglesey<sup>58</sup> and it was there that Annie Amelia, a daughter was born in 1871/3Q. Sadly she did not survive to see her first birthday and she died in 1872/2Q. Five years later, Hester Mary was born in Anglesey in 1877/1Q (presumably at the light).

Jimmy Troth was not located in 1891, but in 1901 he and his wife were together keeping the Avon Lighthouse as Principal Keeper and Assistant Keeper<sup>59</sup> and this again destroys the Knott folklore that Catherine was the *'last female assistant keeper in the Trinity House service.'*

Third man was **Joseph MITCHELL** who was only 20 years old and as a Supernumerary Assistant Keeper he may not have been on the light at the commissioning and probably did not stay long. No further information about him has been found and this is exacerbated by his common Cornish surname.

By 1882 George Knott was joined by a new Assistant Keeper who would become something of a legend – **Frank SQUIBB**. Frank was unmarried when he came on board the lighthouse in 1881/82 and he was no sooner there than he was involved in a serious accident with the fog horn's machinery (to be described in more detail later), but he recovered from his injuries, and married Emma RESTORICK from Colyton in the Axminster District in 1885/4Q. At about this time he served on the Avonmouth light where a daughter Hilda was born in 1887/2Q, before returning to Bull Point for the birth of Samuel Francis at the light in 1889/1Q. Unusually, the couple were still on the light at the 1901 census,<sup>60</sup> when they had no less than **SIX** more boys born between 1892 and 1901 and Frank was still only an Assistant Keeper.

**Jonathan Humphrys TONKIN** also added some local colour to the lighthouse when he joined George Knott as an unmarried Cornishman born in St. Levan in 1857/1Q from Souter Point lighthouse in South Shields. At this light he had shared the duties with Robert DARLING, a name that immediately attracts attention in lighthouse circles. Robert had been born on the Longstone Light in the Farne Islands off the coast of Northumberland in 1846 to Grace Darling's younger brother William Brookes DARLING and his wife Jane and the 1851 census shows the entire family at home on the light.<sup>61</sup> George Knott's relationship with the Darling family was already established through the marriage of his eldest son Henry to Ellen Hall in December 1877, yet this story does not end without a further twist in the tale.

Tonkin must have arrived at Morthoe by 1884 or possibly earlier, for in 1885/4Q he married Clara Beatrice CHUGG from Morthoe, probably in the local parish church. Clara's parents were John and Elizabeth Chugg and her father was the inn keeper of the *Chichester Arms* just behind the parish church.<sup>62</sup> Was it just possible that George and Catherine were invited to the

<sup>57</sup> Tendring District includes the Trinity House Depot at Harwich and Dovercourt among other coastal places

<sup>58</sup> 1871 Census RG10/5754 Folio 15 Page 5

<sup>59</sup> 1901 Census RG13/2399 Folio 179 Page 0

<sup>60</sup> 1901 Census RG13/2151 Folio 30 Page 13

<sup>61</sup> 1851 Census HO107/2420 Folio 190 Page 2

<sup>62</sup> 1881 Census RG11/2249 Folio 12 Page 1

wedding ceremony with the children and is it reasonable to imagine a jolly occasion across the road in the *Chichester Arms* after the service? The couple had three children at the light, Frederick Percival, George Humphry and Rosa Beatrice (GRO Index 1887/1Q; 1889/2Q and 1892/1Q Barnstaple). The 1901 census found him at 13 Mount Gold Road, Plymouth with all the family, yet surprisingly recorded as a 'Retired Light Keeper' even though he was only 40 years of age.<sup>63</sup> Something must have been seriously wrong, for the death of a Jonathan H Tonkin aged 46 years is recorded in Southwark in 1904/3Q.

When George left the light in late 1888, he was relieved as Principal Keeper by **John ARGENT** who in 1881 had been PK in charge of a strange light in the River Thames called the Chapman assisted by George STAPLES (42) of Chelsea. This light was located on mud flats off the coast of Canvey Island and was first lit in 1851. Painted red, it was made entirely of iron and was technically called a 'screw-pile light' and had its own rowing boat slung in davits with a living room beneath the lantern.

Following George's departure for North Foreland in Kent, the 1891 census reveals much more of John Argent's career and in particular a link with the Farne Islands. Twenty years

previously, in 1871, when he was just embarking on his career as a light keeper and was newly married to Sophia, they occupied No.2 Cottage on the Inner Farne Island where little Eveline had been born nine months before. In the next cottage, at No.3, lived Thomas Owen HALL and his wife Grace Horsley Hall and they had two children the youngest of whom was also nine months old.



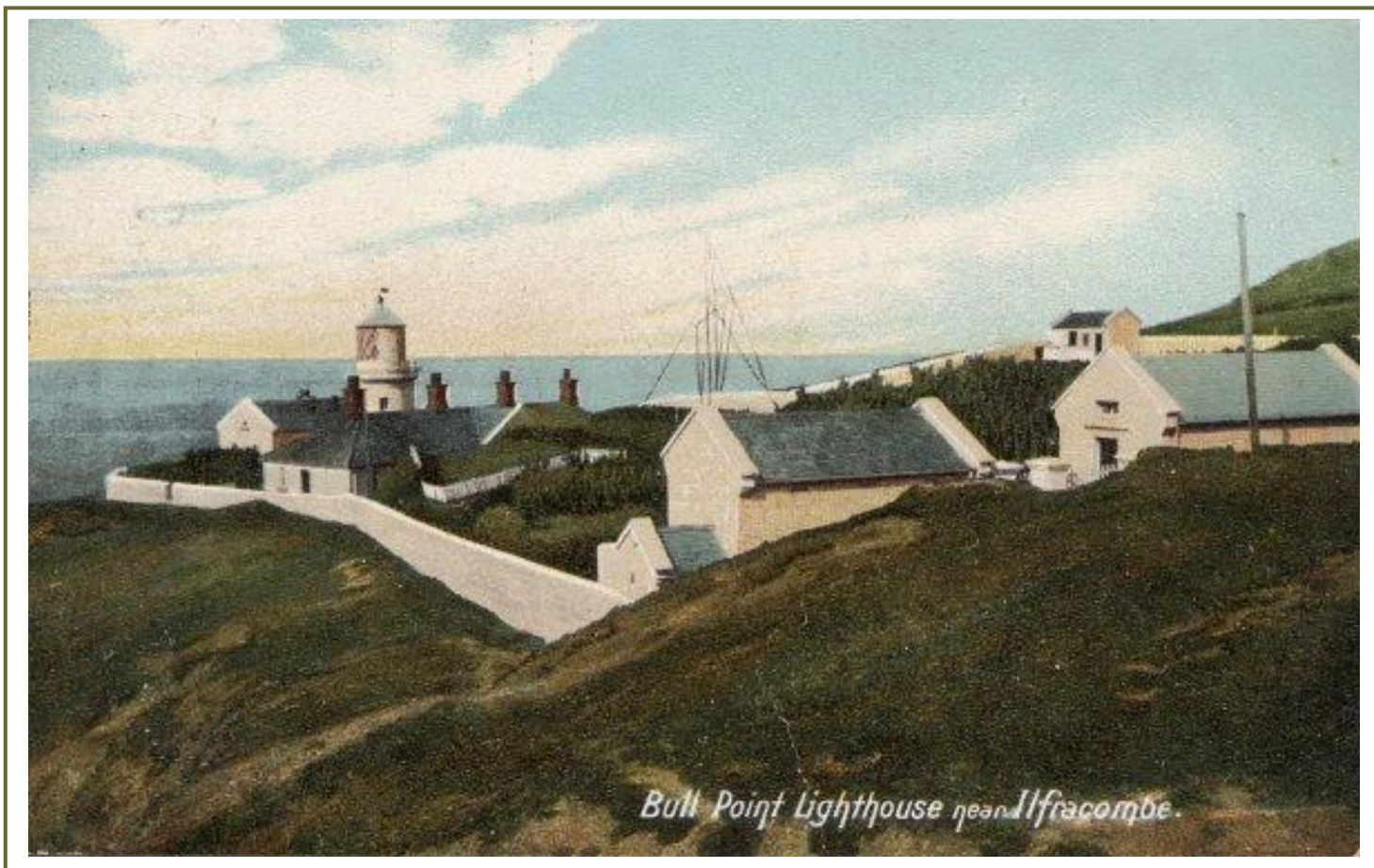
Thomas Hall was

the brother of Ellen Hall, who had married Henry Knott in 1877, and his wife Grace was none other than Grace Darling's niece.<sup>64</sup> So for just a short time on the Bull Point Lighthouse, George was surrounded by colleagues with recent links to the Darling Family and to Grace Darling herself.

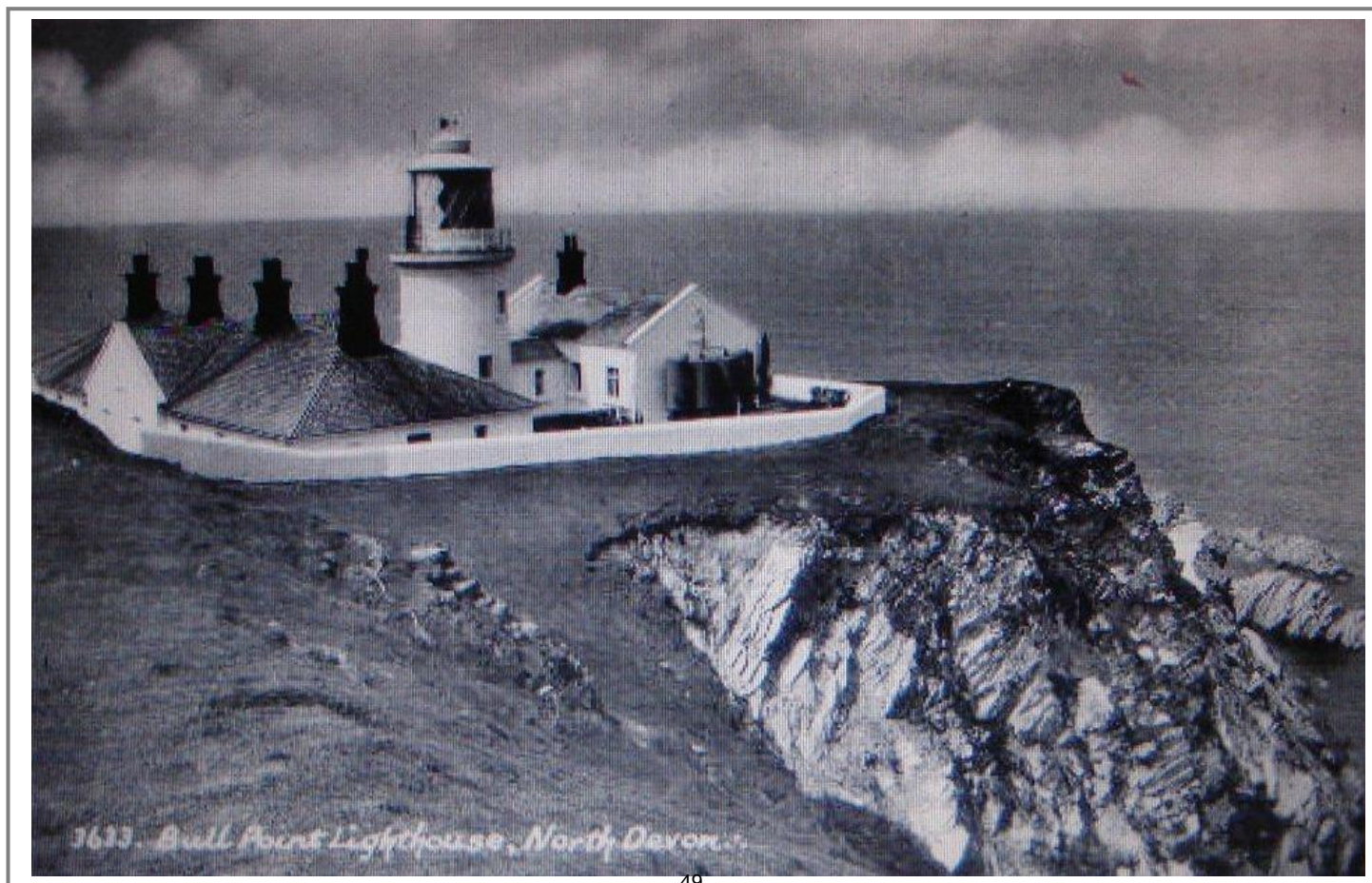
<sup>63</sup> 1901 Census RG13/2095 Folio 159 Page 9

<sup>64</sup> 1871 Census RG10/5178 Folio 95 Page 1





Two splendid Edwardian postcards. The first is dated 14 September 1905 and was sent from Ilfracombe to South Kensington. It shows the full extent of the site with large gardens with plenty of protection. It is not known what the small buildings were for on the perimeter, but they could be privvys. The engine house for the fog horn is in front of the light and there are two short chimneys on the roof that were the original ones. In the photograph below there is a chimney which now matches those on the keepers' accommodation. It was this engine house that collapsed in 1972 and led to the demolition of the light tower. The bungalow survives and is now available as a holiday 'cottage.'



5 Every morning, little Florence Knott stood on the front step of the lighthouse cottage and watched the rest of the Knott children leave for school and very morning she asked the same question. *When can I go to school with Rose?* Her mother always gave her the same reply, *you will be going after Christmas*, but to Florence every week seemed like a year and Christmas 1879 was a whole lifetime away!

Although remote – and most lighthouses are rarely close to the communities they serve – Bull Point was closer to Morthoe than the Bideford Bar Light had been to Braunton, yet it was still a long slog uphill for about a mile to the first farm, North Morte Farm, before the lane continued into the village. Today, parents would be aghast at the prospect of a 4½ year-old girl making the return journey across a windswept cliff-top in the care of her 10 year-old sister, with three brothers tagging along for good measure, but that’s the way it was in 1880.

The schoolhouse was at the heart of the village and the schoolmistress, Miss Margaret Swale, was only 22 years old and lived ‘on the job’ with two very young lodgers – a niece and a nephew – a very odd arrangement. However, it is not clear how the school functioned as there were a large number of children designated ‘scholar’ in the census. In fact there were 47 including the Knott children in and around the village, with another 22 who lived mainly on the farms in the countryside from Woolacombe to Spreacombe and even the railway station housed eight children, three of which were the Rice family. It was customary to segregate the girls from the boys, but the only male in the vicinity who could possibly teach was the Rev. Herbert Tuson, who at 48 years of age was the Curate-in-Charge of Morthoe and lived in the Vicarage with his housekeeper.

Board Schools were just being introduced at this time by the local councils and the School Board at Morthoe was chaired by the parish clergyman sitting with four local ‘worthies.’ Morthoe’s school had been built in 1875 close to the church at a cost of £1200,<sup>65</sup> and its first teacher was Miss Eliza Keats, who not surprisingly, appeared to have moved on by 1881. The children were expected to attend regularly and they sat in classes that took little account of age or ability. ALL the children, boys and girls, each sat together in their own classroom until they reached 13 years of age, when their parents were expected to make their own arrangements for their employment and Herbert had just reached his 13<sup>th</sup> birthday when his family moved to Bull Point. Regardless of the age rule, Herbert joined the school and at the date of the census he was still there, in spite of being nearly 15 years old. So what could they possibly find for Herbert to do in Morthoe?

A search through the census returns for 1881 in the Parish of St. Mary’s Morthoe showed clearly that it was dominated by agriculture with a number of very large farms. Trades of any description were poorly represented as there were only three, the most prominent of which was the mason. There were no less than NINE masons with a stone cutter and a mason’s labourer and half of them were boarders, so what was being built in Morthoe that required so many to work with stone now that the station, the school and the lighthouse were finished? There were two blacksmiths, essential to keep the dozens of horses shod and the agricultural machinery in good repair and finally there were three carpenters, a trade also essential to a village community. They would have provided windows and doors, gates and fences, rudimentary furniture, repaired farm wagons and even provided the occasional coffin. This was the trade that the Knott family resorted to on several occasions down through the generations and Herbert was next in line to work with wood, but who would be his Master?

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<sup>65</sup> The Elementary Education Act 1870 made it compulsory for children aged 5 to 13 and was the first step in the Government provision of education and White’s Directory 1878.

The first candidate was Richard BARNES who lived close to the vicarage and immediately the prospect of a recommendation from the curate springs to mind. Did he suggest Mr. Barnes to George Knott? I think not. Apprenticeships routinely lasted six or seven years and Barnes was already 73 years old and likely to be semi-retired. He died at the beginning of 1891 aged 80.

The remaining two carpenters were slightly younger and they were both in the vicinity of the railway station and quite a long walk from the lighthouse for young Herbert. The closest neighbour to the station house was the *Fortescue Hotel* at Borough Corner. The 'hotel' is still there with its Sunday carvery, but all signs of the Victorian premises of John BUTLER and his next door neighbour blacksmith Thomas Leworthy have disappeared. John had been born in Georgeham 60 years before and lived with his wife Sofia and their unmarried son Thomas.<sup>66</sup> However, beyond the station, to the south, down Willingcott Hill, lay the single cottage of John LOVERING and his wife Elizabeth. John was an Ilfracombe-man aged 58 and the cottage was named '*Temperance Cottage*' which has a non-conformist ring to it and we now know that George Knott held similar religious views. To this day the cottage has two adjacent untidy sheds that could easily have been descended from the workshops and there is a modest yard to go with them, although the cottage seems rather large by the standards of 1881.

So, either of these tradesmen could have provided Herbert Knott with an apprenticeship as both could have given seven good years and either or both of them might have been suggested to George Knott by the Station Master John Rice. He would have known them well as their raw material would have been brought from Barnstaple to the station's goods siding, so a recommendation from him would not be ignored

Further checks revealed that John Butler and Sophia had completely disappeared by 1891, yet John Lovering was a 'retired builder' and still living in the same premises. It was then known by the much grander name of Willingcott House, reflecting its larger size with plenty of room for lodgers and it was normal practice in those days for the Master to provide board and lodging for his apprentice, but does this suggest that Herbert Knott learnt his trade with John Lovering, a man who could easily have had a hand in the building the Bull Point Lighthouse? I suspect that Herbert did not work locally. Instead he took the train into Barnstaple and came home at weekends, but who would the family have known in Barnstaple?

In 1871 there were just 72 houses in the Morthoe parish and ten years later it had increased by NINE. Seven of these would have been represented by the lighthouse (3) and the railway station (4), but there were another five cottages that were empty. Nevertheless the population of Morthoe was around 450, largely agricultural with many farms, farmers and farm labourers, but inevitably there were some interesting households.

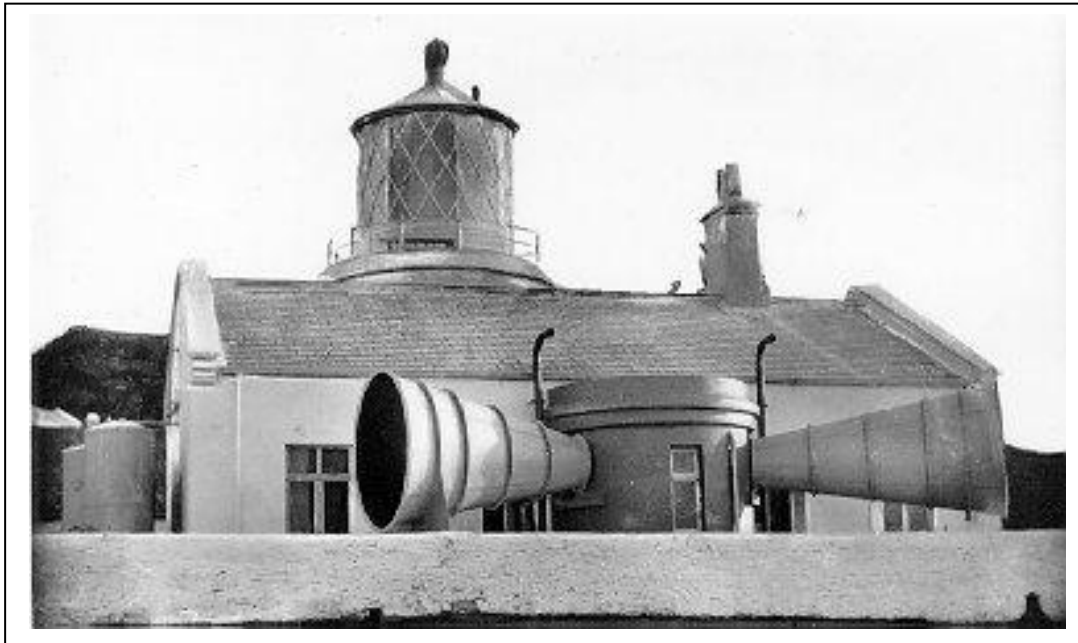
When the Knott's arrived they were pleased to use Richard Gammon's carriages and immediately recognised the name shared with the cab owner in Braunton. He lived at *Rockley House*, next to *Duckpool Farm* and close to the Post Office, where William Tucker, a 70-year-old mason, was the Postmaster receiving and sending mail to Ilfracombe. On the other side of *Rockley House* were five cottages called *The Rookery* and in No. 4 lived Sam & George Ashford. Father and son were 78 and 48 respectively and George was unmarried, but why do I single them out? They were rabbit catchers, probably supplying James Broom the butcher, who lived close to them in the Post Office Court. George Connibear lived in the baker's shop which was next to the school house, but he wasn't the baker. That was the occupation of his wife Anne as George was a mere farm labourer.

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<sup>66</sup> Whites Directory 1850 records Richard Barnes and John Butler as wheelwrights

## **Lightkeeper at Bull Point injured in accident**

**Hand crushed whilst working on the fog horn machinery**



On Wednesday last (*10 May?*) an accident occurred to one of the keepers of the Bull Point Lighthouse named SQUIBBS. The man was attending to the fog horn when his hand became entangled in the machinery and was badly crushed, one of his fingers being dislocated. Dr. King was sent for and attended to the requirements of the injured man. It unfortunately happened that one of the three keepers was away on leave so that the double work of attending to the fog horn and looking after the lighthouse devolved upon the remaining keeper. A coastguardsman was sent to the lighthouse and a supernumerary was telegraphed for.

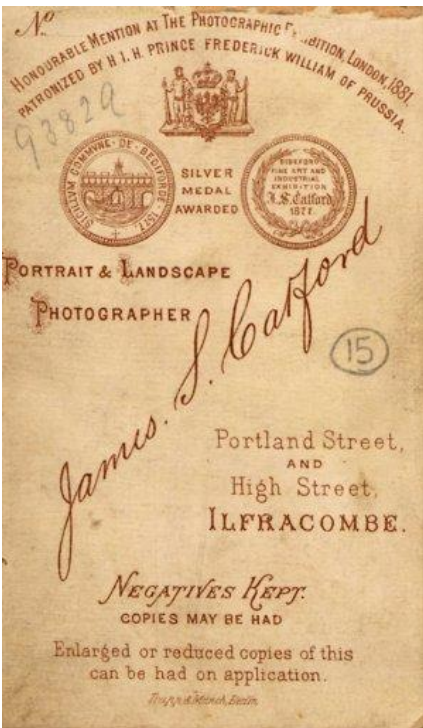
It seems likely that this fog horn was one of the new sirens the first of which had been installed at Dungeness in 1865 to the initial designs of Frederick Holmes and George Slight from three years earlier. This consisted of a rotating slotted disc positioned over a fixed perforated disc and encased in a cylinder. Compressed air or steam was then forced through it and the revolving disc gradually began to rotate with the sound increasing until it had reached its optimum speed and volume. It then provided a descending note as the disc began to slow down. Later versions used a secondary air supply to rotate the disc at full speed before the primary air was injected into it.<sup>67</sup> To transmit the sound, magnificent trumpets were manufactured in many different shapes. The pair of horns at Bull Point were practical and much less aesthetic and the small illustration suggests that they were manufactured by Chance Brothers, the lighthouse equipment engineers from Smethick in Birmingham.



<sup>67</sup> *To Safely Guide Their Way* by Kenneth Sutton-Jones page 41

# Model Photographers

**GEORGE KNOTT** didn't make a model of the Bideford Bar Light whilst he was there, but the new Bull Point Lighthouse must have inspired him to take out his knife once again. Ilfracombe is only 10 minutes from Morthoe Station, but the station is 3 miles from the light and he still had to carry the model to 5 High Street where **James Catford** had his studio. He was a local lad and he had married a local girl in 1872 and by 1881 already had 5 children, but he did a good job on George showing off his full Trinity House uniform to good effect. George's beard is much whiter than the photograph inaugurating the lighthouse in 1879.

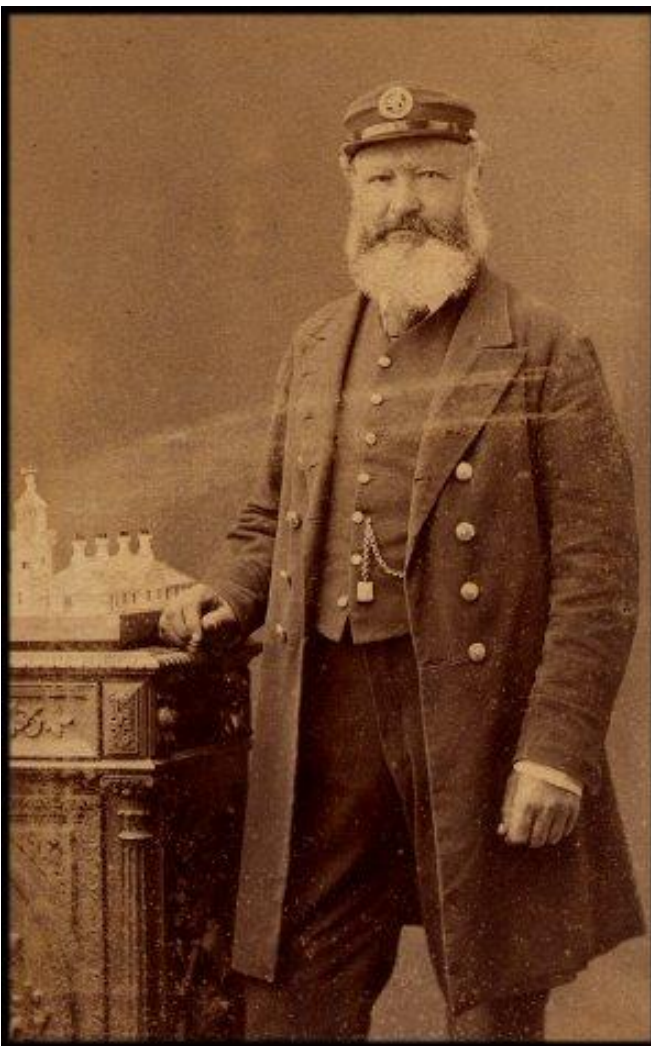
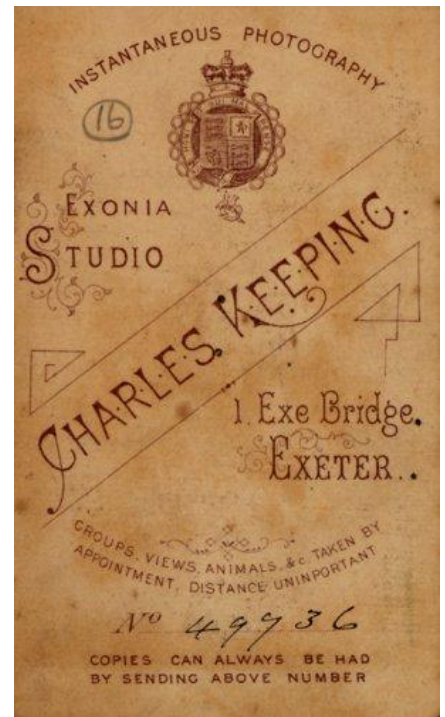


**CATHERINE KNOTT** – For someone who has had eleven children, ten of them born on isolated lighthouses, Catherine's face belies her fifty years.

**Charles Keeping** had been born in Lymington in 1844 and he had first worked in Torquay before moving to Exeter between 1868 & 71. In 1871 he was living in Bridge Street with his wife Elizabeth, but in 1877 Elizabeth died aged 36. In 1881 he was found at 15 New Bridge Street working with three young assistants that included his 19-year-old daughter and his young sister-in-law whilst maintaining his three youngest children at school.

The photograph could have been taken at any time between 1871 and 1881, but an excursion to Exeter from either Braunton or Morthoe would have been quite an unusual occasion. Bridge Street is quite a way from Exeter St. David's Station and inevitably the question arises,

Who did she travel with?



# Testimonials

924

Trinity Wharf  
Neyland  
13 Feb'y 1882

Sir

I am directed by the Elder Brethren to express their approval of the very high state of Efficiency in which the Lighting apparatus, Fog Signal, Caloric Engine & were found by Mr Douglass the Corporation Engineer on the occasion of his recent visit to Bull Point Lt House, and am to acquaint yourself & the other Keepers of the satisfaction of the Board at receiving so favourable a report of the General condition of the Station

I am Sir  
Yr obt Servt  
H. Evans  
Supt

Mr G Knott  
Bull Pt Lt House

## Hugh EVANS

He was born at Holyhead, Anglesey in 1821 and in 1881 he was living on the Trinity Wharf, Burton with his wife Mary (50) and his niece.

He was the 'Marine Superintendent.'  
The wharf was at the end of Ferry Road and had a store with an elderly, resident storekeeper.

RG11/5414 Folio 21 Page 36.

On Saturday 17 February 1877, a letter was published in the **Western Mail** in which he refuted criticisms of the fog guns on Lundy and stated that he had been in charge of the Lundy Station for 30 years.

He signed the letter,

H. EVANS

Trinity Superintendent  
Trinity Warf, Neyland

## William LILE

Nearly five years before the date of his letter, William Lile was living at 1 Neyland Terrace, Llanstadwell with his wife Ellen and seven children.

It was census night  
31 March 1881.

He was the Master of a Trinity Steamer which was probably the steam paddle schooner BEACON of 262 tons which was at Neyland from 1870-1890.

He succeeded Hugh Evans to the more senior post of Superintendent.

He had been born at Solva in Pembrokeshire in 1831.

Bull Point Lt House.

Trinity Wharf  
Neyland, S. Wales

Sir  
14 Dec<sup>r</sup> 1885

the Engineer in chief having reported the high state of Efficiency in which the Illuminating and Fog Signal Apparatus at Bull Point has been kept by you since the lighting up of the Establishment in 1879, I am directed to convey to you the Boards high appreciation of the great care and attention shown by you in the performance of that part of your duties, as also in the maintenance of general good order throughout the Establishment for the period in question

I am

Sir

Your obt Servt

Wm Lile

I have much pleasure in forwarding the above  
to Mr Geo Knott P. Keeper

W.L.  
Supt

# LOCAL BOAT AND CREW SAVED FROM THE ROCKS

Lighthouse keepers play their part in the rescue

*North Devon Journal*

*Thursday 15 October 1885*

The gale that prevailed on Saturday in the English Channel nearly resulted in a fatality to the ketch FANNY 49 tons register, of Barnstaple. She left Newport with the morning tide laden with coals. She came along well until opposite Morte when the mast snapped and left her at the mercy of the waves. For about two hours she washed about in a helpless state and at last finding herself going towards the rocks at Bull Point the anchor was thrown out and after drawing 35 fathoms of chain the vessel was pulled up one fathom from the rocks. The people at the lighthouse despatched a man on horseback for the Ilfracombe lifeboat and rockets were also thrown up from the shore which were seen by George Ley of Lee who at once started for the boat. In the meantime ropes were thrown to the distressed vessel and at the third attempt the rope was secured on deck, but the waves were so rough that the crew would probably have been dashed to pieces if they had attempted to escape by this means.

Eventually the tug ELLIOT & JEFFEY of Newport came to the rescue and getting the ketch in tow took her to Ilfracombe harbour. The lifeboat was got out with most creditable speed and as soon as mid-channel was reached, sails were set and the boat went down channel with much speed to find, however, that her services were not required. She nevertheless kept close to the distressed vessel right back to the harbour in case of the breaking of the ropes or another accident. On the vessel and the lifeboat entering Ilfracombe harbour at about 7 o'clock, the people who had assembled in the neighbourhood raised hearty cheers which were responded to by the crews.

The ketch belongs to Mr. J. Porter and Mrs. Kempe of Barnstaple. Mrs. Kempe is a widow with a long family depending upon the profits of the vessel which was not insured.

*Another correspondent writes,*

On Saturday last, between three and four o'clock in the afternoon a vessel was seen off Morte Point with the distress flag flying. The Morthoe rocket wagon and apparatus were at once got out and in the absence of horses was drawn by men under the leadership of Coastguard Randall. The vessel drifted into Bennet's Mouth where two anchors were dropped. Here the rocket was fired with much success that the crew, four in number, might have been got off, but as a steam tug hove in sight and the captain desired, as is natural, to save both life and his vessel, he preferred the assistance of the tug. After three attempts (a heavy sea running at the time), the tug took her in tow and carried her safely to Ilfracombe. The vessel was named the FANNY of Barnstaple, a two-masted, 51-ton boat loaded with coal. Great praise is due to the working staff of the Morthoe rocket apparatus for the admirable manner in which they tried to save life, they having to drag a heavy laden wagon upwards of two miles over a bad road. The Ilfracombe lifeboat also put to sea, but on meeting the tug returned with her to Ilfracombe.

George Ley was a local fisherman who lived at 1 Park Villas, Lee Village to the west of Ilfracombe with his wife Mary and daughter Emma and he was 44 at the time of the incident.<sup>68</sup>

The only suitable owner in the name 'J. Porter' may have been John Porter of Barnstaple a local fish seller, who in 1881 was 50 years old, but Mrs Kempe was actually Maria Kemp of 16 Holland Street, Barnstaple.<sup>69</sup> Her husband was a Master Mariner John P Kemp born in Barnstaple in 1844, but on the 25 September 1882, whilst Master of the JANE DOUGLAS, he died at sea of inflammation of the lungs,<sup>70</sup> known today as pneumonia. Maria's 'long family' mentioned in the story was a long list of EIGHT children.

<sup>68</sup> 1881 Census RG11/2248 Folio 52 Page 8

<sup>69</sup> 1881 Census RG11/2243 Folio 113 Page 23 for seven children – the last child was born in 1882/1Q Alfred Thomas

<sup>70</sup> Register of Deaths at Sea courtesy of Findmypast

**10** The coasts of North Cornwall and North Devon are very prone to fog at all seasons. Lundy can disappear completely in less than thirty minutes. Mariners quickly become disorientated. Local knowledge counts for nothing when familiar landmarks are enveloped and become invisible to the seasoned eye. The ten-mile channel between the island and the mainland suddenly becomes a tightrope on which one false move will spell disaster. For sailing vessels dependent on the wind for steerage, sails flap listlessly for the lack of it and the tidal currents take charge of the vessel. It can happen suddenly on a bright May morning, last for hours and disappear as suddenly as it came.

For over 50 years, Lundy had its own fog guns. South Stack on Anglesey, where George Knott's son found himself, was another such station, but this very simple solution needed ex-Royal Navy gunners to make it work, yet mainland Devon had nothing. Sound can play tricks under these conditions. A noise can sound close when it isn't and distant when it is close.

When the battleship **MONTAGUE** ran aground at high speed on the south west corner of Lundy in thick fog in 1906, the officers were convinced that they had driven aground at Hartland Point. A landing party was ordered away in the ship's boat to report their grounding to the lighthouse and to ask for it to be relayed to the Admiralty. The lighthouse they found was Lundy North, but the naval party refused to believe what the keepers were telling them.<sup>71</sup>

It was to mitigate these situations that the Elder Brethren of the Trinity House had attempted to create a triangle of light **AND** sound with the building of extra lights at Hartland (1874) and Bull Point (1879) to add to that of Lundy. Yet this serious attempt at improving ALL aspects of safety at sea, was met with scepticism from the local seamen.

The advance in technology from the fog cannon to the fog siren gave lighthouse keepers an added responsibility. It rested entirely in the hands of the principal keeper to decide when the fog signal should be activated and when it should be stopped and for George Knott this would become a burden he would find difficult to bear. It was not the decision itself that weighed so heavily, it was the effect of the sound on his ears and his consciousness. He began to dread the signs of a fog forming and the incessant noise that would come with his decision. I have no doubt that those close to him would have begun to say, *the noise is driving him mad*.

Eventually George was persuaded to seek help. It didn't come easily. It ran contrary to his dutiful and loyal instincts, but he composed a letter to Trinity House respectfully requesting that he be moved to a light station that did not have a fog horn. His request received a sympathetic response and his move to the North Foreland Lighthouse in Kent was reported in the **North Devon Journal** in the following announcement.

*Thursday 18 October 1888*

We hear that Mr. Knott, the principal keeper at the lighthouse at Bull Point is about to be transferred to the North Foreland Lighthouse. This is likely to be a move of some advantage to Mr. Knott and his friends will be glad to know that his services are appreciated by the Trinity House Authorities. His cheerful face and obliging manner will be missed in future by residents in the neighbourhood and visitors to Bull Point.

Catherine was pleased that her husband had gained some respite from his anxiety and she was pleased to be returning to Kent. Nearly thirty years had passed since they had left the South Foreland Light for Plymouth, but she didn't relish yet another family upheaval. Only one child would be leaving with them. Two more would be left behind; Herbert and Rosa.

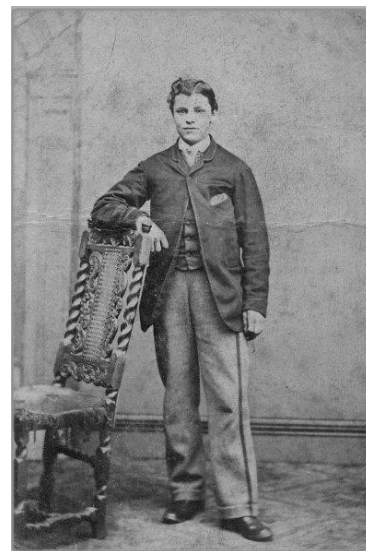
Would she ever see them all again – who knows?

<sup>71</sup> Wikipedia – A Duncan Class battleship of 1901 she ran aground in the early on 30 May 1906 and became a total loss.



## What Happened Next?

**HERBERT JOSEPH KNOTT** - The photograph of a very young man was taken by J.D. Vickery & Sons at their studio at The Bridge, Barnstaple. He married Dinah HEAL in Barnstaple's Baptist Chapel on 8 July 1889 and it is this courtship that suggests that Herbert's apprenticeship as a carpenter & joiner took place in that town. Dinah was 6 years older than Herbert and in 1881 she was in service as a housemaid to a wealthy widow in Exeter. In 1891 they had set up home at 10 Bicton Street in Barnstaple, a street of neat red brick terraces, but No.10 is no longer there. Their first child, Frederick Goldsack K was born soon after the census in 1891/3Q and he was followed by Francis Herbert K in 1894/4Q. Their last child, also a boy was Albert Edward K, born in 1897/1Q but he died towards the end of 1900/4Q. In 1901 the family were still in Bicton Street, but the number is omitted. By 1911 the address had become 10 New Buildings, premises extending to 8 rooms and Herbert is clearly running his own business described as a 'Cabinet Maker & Home Furnisher.' Dinah assisted in the business and both boys were serving their time as 'cabinet makers.' The business was located at 19 Bear Street nearby, as early as 1914. On Friday 15 July 1938 Dinah died at 26 Bear Street and her funeral was conducted at the Grosvenor Street Gospel Hall. Herbert had died in April of the year before in the Royal Devon & Exeter Hospital.



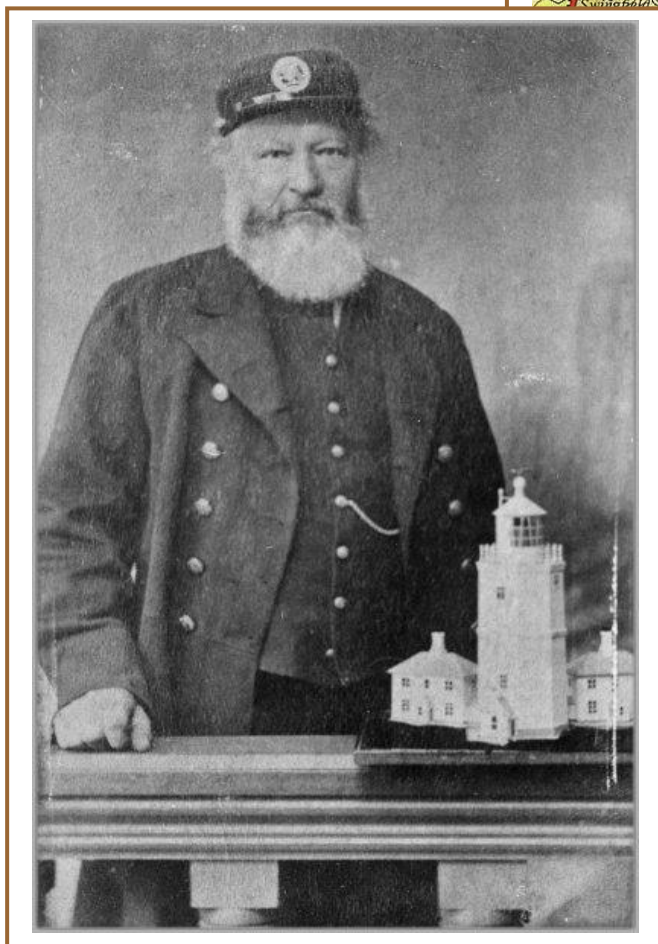
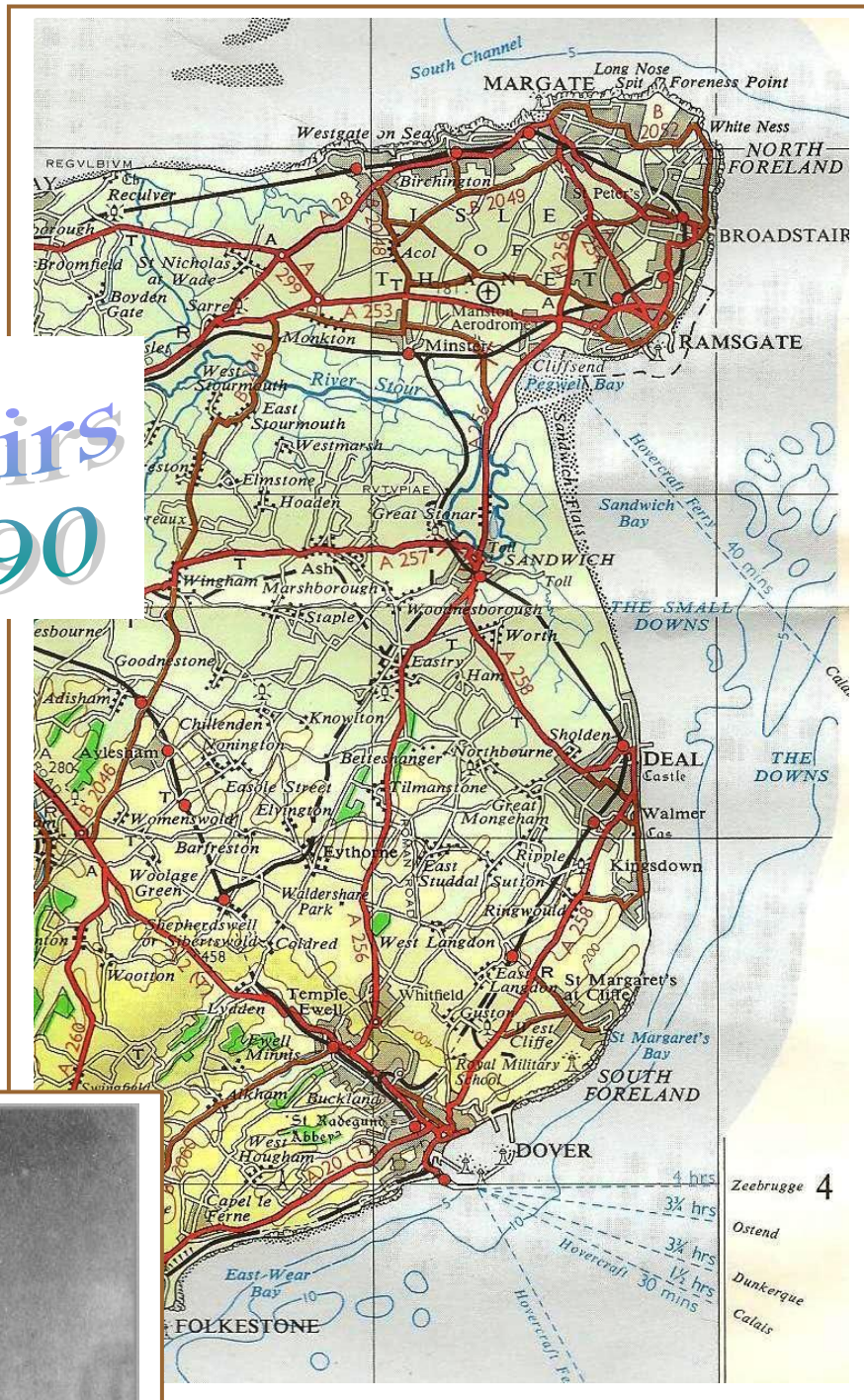
**ROSA ELLEN KNOTT** never married. As a consequence the five censuses 1871-1911 are the only records from which we can glean something of her life as there are no family stories to work with. Her birth in May 1868 was never registered so there is no birth certificate and the death certificate for 1915 has never been seen. Rosa reached 14 years old in 1882, but her employment was not discovered until nine years later when she was located in Prospect Street, Exeter working as a general domestic servant in the house of Ernest Rowe a 'Complete House Furnisher' – note the description. If we have few written records of her, then the opposite is true of photographs. There are 7 in the collection. By now she was 22 years old and the photo (left) was taken in the studio of H. Faulkner White at 173 Sidwell Street, Exeter. Inevitably the next record of her is 1901 when she had moved her employment to Dover and was near her parents. Her employer was a retired solicitor called Robert Naswell and his wife and grown up family occupied No.6 East Cliff where Rosa was the cook. This was a 3-storey house right beneath the castle wall and although there were no gardens, the views from the windows over the harbour would be special. Her name had been recorded as Rose H and her age reduced by 3 years, but again she visited three photographic studios in Dover. They were W.H. Broad at 3 Townwall Street, J.G Whorwell of 7 Bench Street and Martin Jacolette of South Kensington AND Dover. When her mother died in 1910, Rosa was left the contents of her parent's house and in 1911 she was living there at 7 Castlemount Road, Dover and was no longer employed. She died in 1915 aged just 47 years old.

**WALTER GOLDSACK KNOTT** went to Devonport on the 6 February 1885 – just after his 15<sup>th</sup> birthday – and joined the Royal Navy as a Boy2Class on HMS IMPREGNABLE. He served on a succession of obsolescent vessels that stuck close to the shores of England often close to Kent. He had signed to serve 12 years until 1898 and this accounts for the census in which he was missing in 1891, but on the 6 December 1895 he was invalided from the service with a pension and he left from HMS PEMBROKE at Chatham. He returned home to his parents' house, who had now retired to Castlemount Road in Dover and he was at home with them in 1901. He had found work with the Corporation Tramways Department as a fitter's labourer when it started operating in Sept. 1897. The photo (right) taken in Broad's Studio in Townwall Street, Dover, shows Walter with a lily of the valley boutonhole. This might have been his parent's anniversary in 1899, but more likely his wedding portrait in 1901 when he married Emma Amelia HOLMES in Dover. They only had one child, Walter Holmes K born in 1904/4Q. In 1911 they were living at 8 Rosedale Cottages in the Manor Road, Dover and near the tram depot, as Walter was now an electrical fitter working on the trams. Nothing more is known until his death is recorded in the Maidstone district in 1945/3Q aged 75. Emma died in Dover at the end of 1953 aged 84.



**EDMOND HORTON KNOTT** should have been working when his parents left Bull Point, but he has evaded discovery in the 1891 census. He married Alice GOODWIN in Luton in 1895/4Q although Alice was originally from Caddington Bedfordshire. She grew up and worked in the making of straw hats in Luton, yet there is no sign Edmond in Luton in 1891 or anywhere else in the country. In 1897/3Q he was at Neyland for the birth of his first child Catherine, where a Trinity House Depot was located in Pembrokeshire. His next daughter, Florence Matilda was born in Luton in 1900/1Q and as Alice was at home it suggests that Edmond was away. So, this might explain the photograph left, taken at the studio of H.Sawyer & Son., West Savile Street in North Shields and he is clearly in the uniform of a Trinity House Lightkeeper. The 1901 census finds the family together at the South Foreland Light in Kent almost coincident with the birth of Percy George at the light in 1901/2Q. However towards the end of 1902/4Q little Catherine died there aged 5 years. This must have led to Edmond's decision to leave the service for in 1908 he had a greengrocers shop at 2 Sotheron Road, Watford, where he was at the 1911 census. Alice was now close to her family and helped in the shop. Following that nothing more is known of the family. The death of a man named Edmond H Knott was registered in Bedford in 1943/2Q aged 71. It is not known when/where Alice died.

# Broadstairs 1888-1890



## NORTH FORELAND LIGHTHOUSE

Leaving Devon for Kent  
A Little Bit of History  
Forever on the Move  
A Keeper's Duties  
To Pension and Dover  
Weddings and an Anniversary  
The Lamp is Put Out

## Leaving Devon for Kent

It was a small, but silent group that gathered in the courtyard of the Bull Point Lighthouse, on that chilly November day in 1888. As the two ladies - Clara Tonkin and Emma Squibbs - self-consciously fidgeted with their coat buttons, the door of the Principal Keeper's cottage opened and Florence Knott appeared with her mother Catherine behind her. She recoiled at the sight of the farewell gathering and tried to push back inside, but her mother blocked her attempt. No one knew quite what to say to each other. George Knott closed the front door behind him for the last time and walked over to Jonathan Tonkin with his hand held out. George's emotions at the parting were mixed and confused. He felt that he was deserting a job he loved. It was just a month before his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday and he felt that he should have stayed until his retirement, but he couldn't live with that fog horn any longer.

The two young children of the two Assistant Keepers ran to Florence and clutched at her skirts. Neither toddler was more than 18 months old, but as Florence was no longer at school, she had spent a lot of time with both Hilda Squibbs and Fred Tonkin and both had come to see her as an alternative 'mother,' but the time had come to leave.

The last handshakes had been made, the last words had tailed off into an embarrassed silence and Florence had disentangled the young children from her skirts, so George and Catherine turned to walk to the front gate where Gammon was waiting with one of his cabs to take them to the station. Their trunks had been collected the previous day by the station porter with his horse-drawn wagon, so they should be well on their way to Broadstairs by now and Catherine was hoping that they would get there before them.

The lay of the land and the direction of the lane to Morthoe soon rendered the lighthouse invisible and George was glad that he could no longer see it. He wanted to look to the future and the sooner he could reach his home county of Kent the better he would be pleased. A long train journey lay in front of them beginning at Morthoe, through Braunton to Barnstaple for a change to the Bideford to Exeter train; they then had to change again for the train to Paddington via Bristol, which was followed by a ride in a Clarence or 'growler' carriage through London's Trafalgar Square to Charing Cross for the South Eastern Railway train to Ramsgate. George and Catherine would get off at Broadstairs and find another cab which would take them along the coast road to the aristocrat of lights, North Foreland Lighthouse. It was a long journey. They would not get there until after dark, but this time Catherine had only Florence to concern her and she was no bother - no bother at all.

It was already getting dark when the train set off from Charing Cross station to make its way across northern Kent passing through Chatham, Faversham, Herne Bay and Margate until finally reaching Broadstairs.

It was late when the Knott family stepped from the train, but the friendly porter had no difficulty in pointing out a small hotel just a short walk from the station. George had thought it prudent not to disturb the keepers at their watch with the family's late arrival. The morning would bring a new day.



Charing Cross Station forecourt in 1888

# A Little Bit of History

North Foreland is a chalk headland where the North Sea and the English Channel meet.

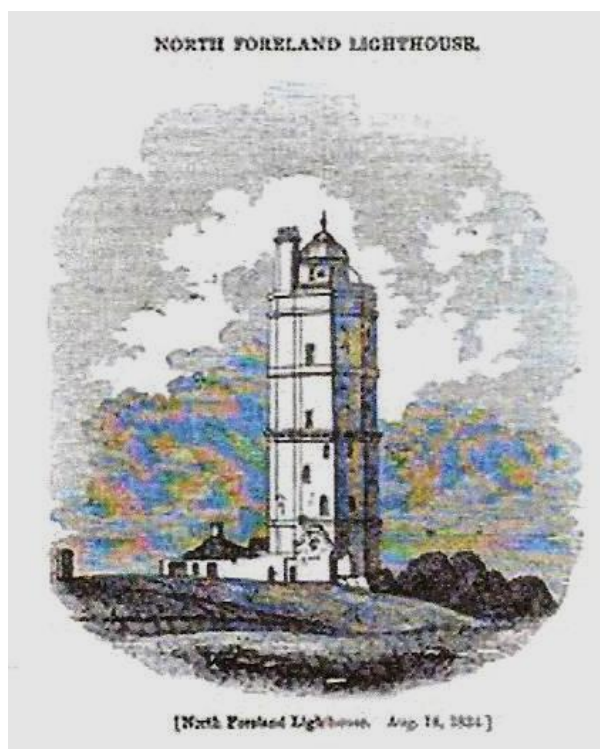
The lighthouse marks the approach to the River Thames for London-bound ships coming up the English Channel.

A light was shown from the headland as early as 1499, but in 1634/36 Sir John Meldrun was given a patent to exhibit lights at both North and South Forelands by Charles I and this empowered him to collect dues of 1 penny per ton from British ships and 2 pence per ton from foreign vessels. The lighthouse was similar to its sister light at South Foreland and is thought to have consisted of a two storey octagonal tower made of timber, lath and plaster with an unprotected coal burning grate on the top. Ironically the fire was its undoing and although it had survived for 47 years it was burnt down in 1683.

By 1691 a new tower almost 40 feet high (12m) had been built from brick, stone and flint, much of which survives in the present lighthouse and a record exists that suggests that the brazier consumed 100 tons of coal in 1698. The keepers were expected to keep the fire bright by the constant use of bellows on calm nights, but they were paid £13 per annum with a free cottage and coal in return for their labour. Jackson suggests in his book,<sup>72</sup> a somewhat different chronology. He says that following the fire in 1683 it was replaced by a coal-fired beacon ten years later and this was also burned down soon after it was lit. It was then that the octagonal brick and stone tower was built.

The lighthouse came into the hands of the Trustees of the Greenwich Hospital in 1719 and they used the surplus from the light dues for the upkeep of the hospital for the benefit of seamen. They enclosed the fire in a glazed lantern soon afterwards,<sup>73</sup> probably in an attempt to economise on the coal consumption. Bellows again had to be employed throughout the night to keep it bright as there was now no natural wind-assisted draught, but the rudimentary window panes soon blackened with soot and negated the reason for enclosing it. There arose a steady stream of vociferous complaints from seamen that it could not be seen in anything other than clear weather and some shipping casualties were blamed on the lack of a visible light. Seamen who regularly plied the Channel said that the glow from the open brazier could easily be seen reflected in the sky above the headland. The Hospital Trustees sent Sir John Thomson to investigate the situation and he recommended that the lantern be removed immediately and the status quo restored and this is thought to have happened about 1730/32.

Thus it remained for 60 years, when in 1793 it was decided to increase the height of the tower by another two storeys adding 45 feet to its height and raising it to over 85 feet. A copper floor was laid in the lantern gallery and the coal brazier was replaced by 18 oil lamps.



<sup>72</sup> *Lighthouses of England and Wales* by Derrick Jackson Page 77

<sup>73</sup> The dates for this modification and its removal vary from source to source.

Another 40 years were to pass before the lighthouse was purchased by the Trinity House in 1832, following which they made a number of unspecified alterations, but one that is recorded is the addition, in 1840, of the two rectangular keepers' houses to either side of the tower which were connected to the tower by a short corridor. However, a new and unexpected function for the light emerged that the keepers were not altogether ready for – tourists. It became fashionable to visit the lighthouse from Margate and climb to the gallery to take in the spectacular views over Margate and the surrounding coastline.<sup>74</sup>

In 1890, when George Knott was its Principal Keeper, there is a suggestion that an 'improved lantern house' was built (or was it rebuilt?) on the top of the tower. It was alleged to be an unusual design derived to accommodate a 3-tiered array of parabolic reflectors, but these were not fitted until 1904. Instead a pair of eight-wick burners for heavy mineral oil and made to a Trinity House pattern, were installed in 1894.

The first thing that George did after breakfast on his first day of duty was to take a quiet walk around the lighthouse to see what equipment it had that he was familiar with. He started at the optic in the lantern and worked his way down to the ground level. It was so nice outside that he was tempted to walk around the lighthouse grounds, admiring the shape of the light and its proportions. He began to think over his time on the South Foreland Light and to wonder why he had never been here before. He had always known about this light, yet it was an old friend that he had never met. It would make a splendid model.

It was a lovely location, so different from all of his previous lights. Naturally there was always a sea view. The light was 188 feet above the high water mark, but this was not a rocky cliff top, this was rural. Its perimeter wall was edged by fields that had been recently ploughed so there must have been a crop there. The light was surrounded by dozens of little cottages occupied by agricultural labourers and the scattered community had a strange name – Reading Street. The main road between Broadstairs and Margate passed the front gate and just a mile down the road was Broadstairs itself. It was a very pleasant little town, totally unlike Morthoe and Braunton, yet it was not Broadstairs, but St. Peters Thanet, that everyone seemed to call it. It was a place that was on the brink of change. Soon, there would be another industry – house building – as the middle and upper classes discovered its delights and wanted to live there. Large, expensive villas would begin to line the cliff top by the end of the century, but that was the future. George was just glad that there would be no fog signal to disturb his days and he could enjoy a walk along the new promenades with Catherine on his days off.

Of course South Foreland Light was his immediate neighbour to the south, but he thought it unusual to be surrounded by half-a-dozen light ships. I wonder if he knew their names – CORK – GALLOPER – GIRDLER – KENTISH KNOCK – SUNK and TONGUE. What a curious collection of names! But this was the approach to the River Thames Estuary. This was an extremely busy place and it was also a hazardous one where sand banks abounded and his colleagues in the Trinity House service manned curious lighthouses on legs with even more curious names like MUCKING, CHAPMAN and DOVERCOURT.

A fussy northerly wind had begun tugging at the Trinity House flag, rattling the lanyards against its pole. It was open sea all the way to Harwich and beyond. George buttoned up his frock coat and shook himself out of his reverie. It was time to get down to work. Today, there are no keepers to see that the light flashes five times every 20 seconds. The white light is visible over 19 nautical miles and the red sector lights are visible for 15 and 16 miles.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Penny Magazine 19 September 1835 Page 365

<sup>75</sup> This piece is a compilation from three sources – Trinity House, Wikipedia and worldwide lighthouses

## TRINITY HOUSE Lightkeepers' Manual 1896 – Oil Lamps

**Every morning at daybreak**, the keeper should ascend to the lantern and proceed with his duties as follows: if the apparatus is revolving, the motor weight of the clockwork will be entirely wound up and fastened, the work stopped and the wheel which communicates motion thrown out of gear.

If the lamp be mounted in the apparatus on a movable table, that table will be lowered. If the apparatus be hoisted on a bracket, it will be lowered until it rests on the service-table intended to receive it.

The light will be extinguished, observing the precautions mentioned above, and the chimney will be wiped with care within and without, then wrapped in a dry cloth and placed where it will be free from dust.

The lamp will be removed from the apparatus, and, if it be a constant-level one, placed on its service-stand.

The apparatus will be dusted by a feather brush, and wiped with a soft linen cloth that is free from dust. If any part be spotted with oil, it will be washed with a little spirits of wine. The apparatus will then be covered with its linen cover. The glass of the lantern will be carefully wiped within and without, and, if necessary, cleaned with whiting, or, if necessary, with polishing-rouge.

If the lantern be provided with curtains, they will be hung in place.

The service-table, the pedestal and interior part of the lantern wall will be dusted, and the staircase swept.

This done, the lamp will be taken into the store-room and weighed to ascertain the amount of oil consumed during the night; then it will be emptied, and the oil poured into the strainer. The oil which has fallen into the drip-cup during the night will be placed in the vessel kept for leavings, and reserved for the use of the keepers.

The burner will be cleaned with care within and without. The burned oil attached to its edges will be removed with the triangular scraper; a bottle-brush will be passed through the interior air-tube, and the outside wiped with a linen cloth.

The buttons of the lamps burning schist oil<sup>76</sup> will be carefully wiped.

The body of the lamp will be wiped and cleaned. Finally, the lamp will be filled, the wick trimmed or replaced, and the lamp again set in the apparatus, so that everything may be ready for lighting up at evening.

Care will be taken that the spare lamp, which should be in the light-room, is in a serviceable condition. If the apparatus be sidereal, two extra wick-carriers, provided with their wicks, should be ready to be placed in the lamp. A can filled with strained oil will be carried up into the lantern, or placed at the foot of the pedestal, to be poured into the spare lamp if required.

**Every evening at sunset**, the keeper will ascend into the lantern, after having provided himself with a lighted lucerne.

If the morning duties have been regularly performed, the following state of things will appear:

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<sup>76</sup> Oil distilled from bituminous schists

The lamp of the apparatus will be in place and ready to be lighted; its chimney will be in the service-closet, as will the extra lamp, the burner, the two chimneys and the service box containing various utensils.

The weight of the revolving machinery in lights varied by flashes will be found entirely wound up, the main wheel held by its bolt, and the wheels which communicate motion out of gear.

The cover of the apparatus will be removed, and the lighting commenced half an hour after sunset, so that the light may be at its full brilliancy by nightfall, and in this operation the directions just given will be followed.

If the apparatus be on rollers, it will be placed in the position it ought to occupy during the night, and kept there by means of a stop-bolt.

**At nightfall** the curtains of the lantern will be removed, folded and placed in the service-closet, if the apparatus contained in a fixed lantern.

If the apparatus be in a moveable lantern, this will be hoisted to the full height of the scaffold or pedestal.

If the apparatus shows a variable light, the revolving machinery will be put in motion immediately after lighting. To do this it is sufficient to gear the cog-wheels, withdraw the bolt of the main wheel, and remove the pin which holds the motor-weight.

**When the cold is so intense** that colza oil will congeal, the following precautions will be taken before lighting:

1st: An hour before sunset the lamp will be taken down and emptied, and the oil heated until too hot for the hand to be held in it; after which the burner will be plunged in it and kept there some moments; it will then be restored to place, and the oil poured back into the lamp.

2nd: The heater will be got ready and put in place. From April 1st to October 1st, the light will be visited by the keeper at least once every night, and during the remainder of the year twice every night, and oftener, if from any cause there may be reason to fear that the light may go out or decrease much in intensity.

**These nocturnal visits will be made during the summer at about midnight; in the winter at about 11 p.m. and 2 a.m. At each visit the keeper will carry the lighting-lamp.**

When the keeper sees that the wick is charred, and should be trimmed or cleaned, he will proceed as follows, according to the kind of lamp.

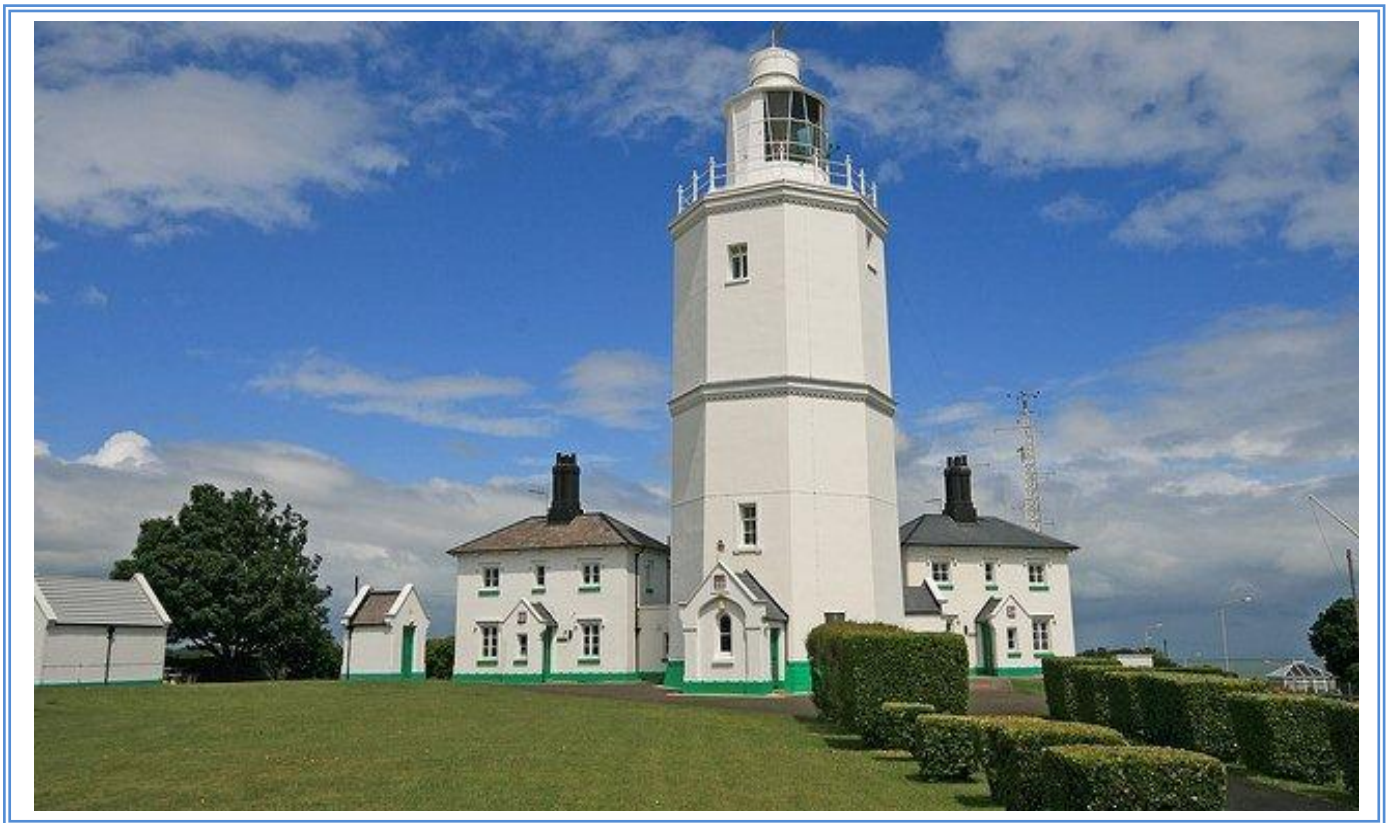
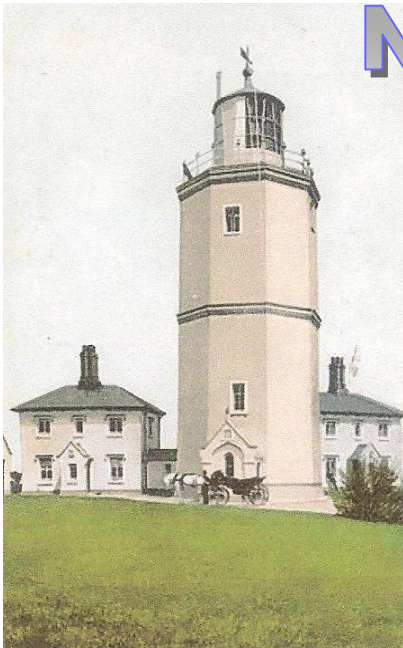
If it be a constant-level or mechanical lamp, he will immediately replace it with the spare lamp, having filled this with oil and lighted outside the apparatus. If the lamp belonging to sidereal apparatus, he will remove the wick-carrier and replace it with one of the spare ones, which he will immediately light. All these operations should be performed as quickly as possible.

Having properly placed the new lamp, the one taken from the apparatus will be set on the service-table, and then trimmed so that it may be returned to place if necessary.

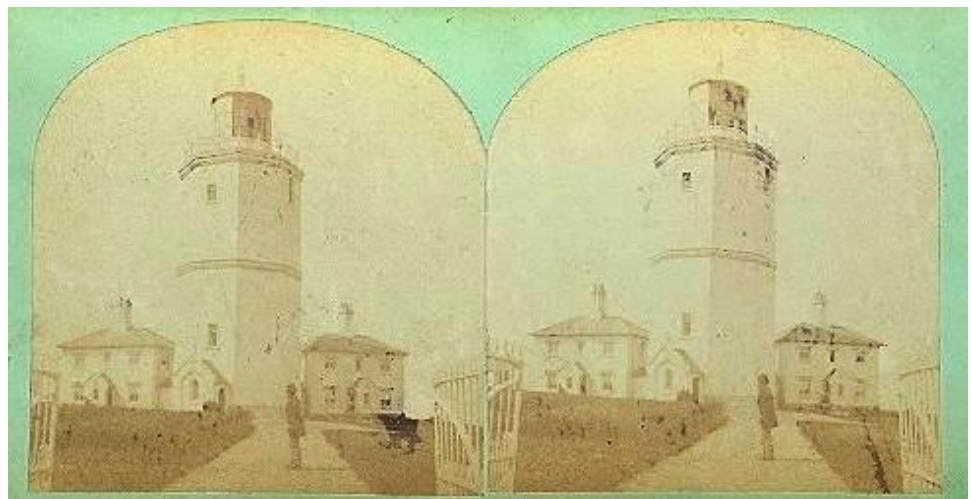
The piston of the moderator lamp should be wound up at each visit.

When the apparatus is lighted by a schist-oil lamp with a cistern below, care should be taken to change the service lamp towards the middle of the night, lighting the extra lamp before putting it in place. In no case should oil be poured into a schist-oil lamp while it is lighted.

# North Foreland Lighthouse



The images on this page show that North Foreland Light changed little in over 100 years from the 1890's stereo slide card (right) and the Edwardian post card (top left) to my own photograph of 2004 (top right). The main picture shows clearly the only significant change in its appearance on the top of the cupola is the drum ventilator that replaced the ball and weather vane version.







The main picture 'A' taken by the author in 2004 is rarely featured in publications, but it shows that the houses were 'blind' on the side that the lamp faced to avoid confusion when seen from the sea. However in George's time there were no other houses in the vicinity, so the lamp was not in competition with any other lights. How different it is today. George would not recognise its surroundings with pictures B, C & D taken from the three landward sides. The fourth picture E is another unfamiliar view for George and was taken from the MV BALMORAL by Ian Boyle on the 12<sup>th</sup> November 2006.

# Forever on the Move

George Knott's time on the North Foreland Light was very short. It lasted less than two years, but it came at a time that is difficult to evaluate. He arrived on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1888, but who he relieved is not clear. In 1881 the Principal Keeper was **Thomas JONES**, but he died soon after the census in the same second quarter of that year, at the age of 59. It was the 27<sup>th</sup> October 1881 before a Principal Keeper named **WILLIAMS** arrived to take his place. He stayed until the 7<sup>th</sup> March 1888, leaving a gap of eight months before George Knott arrived to take charge.

It was very much the same story of uncertainty for George's Assistant Keeper. In 1881 there were two unmarried keepers sharing one of the houses, whilst Thomas Jones, his wife Ann and grown family of four shared the other house. These two single men were Robert HURST, who was aged 38 and born in St. Lawrence, Thanet (Ramsgate?) and **Alfred FROST** who was 22 and from Northumberland.

**Robert Fearman HURST** was still at North Foreland in 1887/2Q when he married a local girl from Margate, Mary Ann LAURENCE who was twelve years his junior and within a year they had a daughter born at the lighthouse. Ethel Mary was registered in the Thanet registration district in 1888/2Q<sup>77</sup> but it was the 6<sup>th</sup> October 1890 before Trinity House moved the family to Flatholm, an island in the Bristol Channel off Cardiff.<sup>78</sup> So, Robert was there when George arrived and he was very experienced in the operation of the North Foreland Light.

When the Hurst Family moved away, they were replaced on the 14<sup>th</sup> November 1890 by **Charles Daniel PETTIT** and his wife Emma bringing with her their young son Charles Stanley who had been born at the South Foreland Light early in 1889 (1Q Dover). Charles Daniel was a local boy from the parish of St. Peters, but Emma was born in the tiny village of Chilham between Ashford and Canterbury. They married, in all probability, in Emma's parish church in the summer of 1878 (3Q East Ashford) and their first lighthouse together was at Trevoze on the north Cornish coast. It is not known where they were before joining South Foreland or when they came. Charles made the lighthouse service his life's career and in 1901 he and Emma with two children<sup>79</sup> were on the famous Farne Islands with keeper Robert Darling and by 1911 Charles was the Principal Keeper at Winterton in Norfolk.

When George Knott came to relinquish his last lighthouse, his relieving Principal Keeper was Scotsman **David BRIGGS** from Fifeshire, who was almost the same age as George, but the family did not arrive until the 25<sup>th</sup> September 1890, four weeks after George's departure on Friday 29<sup>th</sup> August. David Briggs was accompanied by his wife Isabella, also from Scotland (Lanarkshire) and their 23-year-old daughter with an eye-catching name - Ellen Margaret Hall BRIGGS - and she was a music teacher,<sup>80</sup>

This name is eye-catching for one reason. It is the same name as that of the lady who married George Knott's eldest son Henry - Ellen Margaret HALL - so this needs some investigation and explanation. Ellen had been born at Whitby, the same light as the one claimed by the HALL Family as 'their own' and in 1871, when Ellen was 3 years-old, she was one of five children, who with her parents lived in the High Light. The South Light was manned by John HALL (60) who lived there with his wife Elizabeth (60) and their daughter Ellen Margaret HALL who was 23 years-old.<sup>81</sup> So it looks as if the name originates within a very close friendship between the Halls and the Briggs, but was it really that simple?

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<sup>77</sup> Her birth was announced on Saturday 7 April 1888 in the Whitstable Times & Herne Bay Herald

<sup>78</sup> 1891 RG12/4408 Folio 103 Page 1

<sup>79</sup> Gertrude Lilian HURST was born at North Foreland in 1892/2Q Thanet and they had two other unidentified children that they lost.

<sup>80</sup> 1891 RG12/733 Folio 152 Page 1

<sup>81</sup> 1871 RG10/4849 Folio 93 Page 14

# The FINAL Entry



George Knott left the lighthouse for the last time on the 29<sup>th</sup> August 1890. The dates of his arrival and departure at North Foreland were transcribed from the lighthouse log book by Gerry Douglas Sherwood, Principal Keeper and now the Archivist for the Association of Lighthouse Keepers.

Here, Principal Keeper Gordon Medicott makes one of the last entries in that log.

The light was automated at a ceremony attended by the The Master of Trinity House HRH The Duke of Edinburgh on the 26<sup>th</sup> November 1998 at which the keepers folded up the flag and handed it back for safe keeping together with the keys of the tower. The sad duty of closing the door for the last time fell to Principal Keeper Dermot Cronin.

The Trinity House service was very strongly influenced by the Royal Navy and they regulated a man's life through his birthday. It was the one all important date. George's birthday was on the 23<sup>rd</sup> November and in 1890 he would have served 44 years from the age of 18 – another important milestone in Naval rituals. However, it was Friday 29<sup>th</sup> August 1890 when George's service career ended. His time at North Foreland had been brief. It was less than two years, but his time had now come to retire as a 'Trinity Pensioner' and to forget about the daily responsibility of keeping a light in tip-top condition.

George and Catherine retired to **10 Castlemount Road, Dover** and when we first saw the houses in 2005 I was astonished at the modern, semi-detached appearance with side 'front' doors. The 24 houses, all on one side of the road, have amazing views south westwards across the valley to the Western Heights, with the town nestling at the bottom, whilst behind them lay the Connaught Park and the huge fortified hill top of Dover Castle which dominates the approach to the houses from the north. A number of the houses retain their original fret-worked fascia boards and the chimneys give away the fact that there was a fireplace for each of their four rooms. Imagine my surprise when my investigations revealed that the street had begun being built in 1870 and by the 1871 census the first six had been built and numbers 1 to 11 occupied. The road was then known as 'The Model Cottages' and the resident of No.7 was William M Horton and his wife Elizabeth and Bill was the key to this small part of my story.

The couple were still in the house in 1881 when the name of the road had been changed to Castlemount Cottages and nothing had changed by 1891. William Mannings Horton had been born in Ewell in 1818 and he had worked as a blacksmith throughout his time in No.7, but in 1891 he was 73 years old and it was no surprise to find that he died in 1894/2Q aged 76. His wife Elizabeth was much older than Bill and she had been born in St. Margaret's @ Cliffe in 1812, but she soldiered on as a widow until 1897/2Q when she died aged 85.

My interest in No.7 is simply that it was always considered to be the Knott family home, but that was not possible when George and Catherine arrived and the house did not become vacant until mid-1897, so the question must be asked, why did they pick that street and why did they move from 10 to 7?

In 1891 George and Catherine were sharing No.10 Castlemount Road with daughter Mary Jane, who at 27 years of age was a cook in domestic service and she had joined them from East London, after they had left her in Braunton. Florence was also at home and only 15 years old, but an examination of all the other occupants of the houses in the road produced some



CASTLEMOUNT ROAD was built by the Dover Cottage Building & Improvement Society based on a concept by Prince Albert to improve the dwellings of the labouring poor.

The population of the street was exactly 100 people and represented a broad mixture of quite ordinary occupations. Several people had been born in St. Margaret's @ Cliffe and among them was Ann Friend, the wife of Bill Friend and George's next door neighbour at No.11. Then there was a gardener called John Marsh (35) at No.21 and both he and his wife Mildred had been born in George Knott's village. Their next door neighbour in No.9 (the other half of their house) was John Fisher, a coachman and groom with his wife Jane and five children, and John had been born in St. Margaret's @ Cliffe in 1853. So, George & Catherine might have been known to any one of these neighbours who might have suggested a vacant house to them.

However, the key to the move must be found at the last house - No.24. Its occupants on census night were a boatman in HM Customs named Arthur Knott with his wife Dorothy and their two daughters Florence aged 9 and Lilian, a 9-month-old baby. Arthur was the fourth child of George and Catherine and they were delighted to have the opportunity to live close to their two granddaughters, the youngest of whom was only just beginning to sit up. So Castlemount Road became important to the Knott Family. Yet, there was one more piece of life's jig-saw sitting there, patiently waiting to be placed in the family picture.

Four doors down the street at No.14 lived the Clark Family. Hamilton Clarke was 41 years old and he worked as a goods porter probably in the docks. He and his wife Matilda had four growing children and the two eldest had already left school. One of them was 14 year-old John Hamilton Clark and he had already been placed in domestic service, but he wasn't happy about that and nurtured more ambitious plans, but it was still only 1891 and this jig-saw piece would lie dormant for several years to come.

Meanwhile on Monday 10 August 1891, a young man left his home in Ainsworth Street, Cambridge and travelled to the Norfolk coast at Great Yarmouth. He was 18 year-old William Robert Pilgrim and his destination was the No.4 Depot of the Royal Garrison Artillery where he signed to serve seven years under the colours.<sup>82</sup> This simple, innocent action would ultimately lead him to Dover and into the Knott Family picture, but not yet.

It was Wednesday 12 October 1892 when 9 Company RGA was posted to Dover Castle and sometime between that date and September 1894, when he was with 20 Company RGA at Sheerness, William Pilgrim met, courted and became engaged to Mary Jane Knott.

1894 was also the year when the elusive Ann Dixon Knott appeared in Dover and married in controversial circumstances and her story appears on a following page. Then in December 1895 Walter returned home to Dover after having been invalided out of the Royal Navy at Chatham.<sup>83</sup> This unexpected change of fortune probably upset his anticipated long service career. Instead he was unemployed and had to set about finding himself a job, but was there a room for him in the house? Mary and Florence were still there, or were they?

Mary Jane was eleven years older than Florence and she had already spent some time in domestic service as a cook. In December 1895 Florence was approaching her 21<sup>st</sup> birthday and probably had found a similar position in a local household. Servants in those days were expected to 'live-in' as their hours were long and their employers were very demanding, so it is very likely that neither of them was living in Castlemount Road when Walter returned home in need of board and lodging. There could have been an empty room ready for him.

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<sup>82</sup> William's full service record has been acquired and is described elsewhere.

<sup>83</sup> Walter's full service record has been acquired and is described elsewhere.

That is a question that might well be asked of Ann Dixon Knott. Of all the children of George and Catherine Knott, Ann Dixon Knott is the most enigmatic. I have never found her in the 1881 census and where she was during that decade is anyone's guess, but in 1891 she reappeared in a most unexpected set of circumstances.

Ann's eldest brother Henry Thomas Knott, lighthouse keeper, had lost his wife in 1886 in tragic circumstances just days after the birth of twins. Henry was left with five young children and no one to care for them. This part of the story is written elsewhere, but by the end of 1890 he had returned from a duty on the Minicoy Light in Ceylon that had near fatal consequences. Trinity House was unsympathetic and sent him to St. Ann's Head in Pembrokeshire, but what was he to do with the children? Let Betty Roberts explain.<sup>84</sup>

*There had been a scandalous affair with one keeper and his housekeeper and no lighthouse keeper was now allowed to have a housekeeper. He consulted his sister-in-law, who had charge of the children in Holyhead, and found them happy and well. The two eldest, Katie and John were doing well at school. Katie was having music lessons and was certainly a gifted pianist. However, Henry wanted to have his family with him and asked his sister-in-law if she could introduce him to anyone who would marry him, act as his housekeeper and bring up his children. He was introduced to Sarah Jane May, daughter of Captain Francis May and she did agree to marry him on his terms. The marriage took place on the 28<sup>th</sup> December 1891 at the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel in Crewe and after the wedding the entire family went to live at the St. Ann's Head Light.*

Now, it is often the case with Betty's writing that it is not entirely accurate and the 1891 census tells a slightly different story. It shows that Henry was already resident on the light and his five children were not in Holyhead, but with him on census night 5/6 April 1891 and far from being banned from having a housekeeper, Ann Dixon Knott was present and described, not as his sister, but as his housekeeper and his relationship with her is ignored.

So having found herself redundant after her brother's peculiar arrangement, she seems to have drifted back to Dover. What she did and where she lived is unknown, but by the late Spring 1894 she had met and agreed to marry Charles SMITH, who was nearly twice her age. He was not even a local man. Charles was a baker turned farmer whose home was in Cranbrook in rural Kent and in 1891 his household in that village included two adult daughters one of whom was acting as his HOUSEKEEPER. Esther Smith was 25 years old and the inevitable happened within the next three months – she married.<sup>85</sup> This left her elderly father without the support around the house that he was used to, but what made him go to Dover in search of a 'housekeeper' and how did he come to meet and then marry Ann?

The photograph of Ann taken in the studio of A.J. Grossman at 16 Snargate Street, Dover could easily be Ann in her wedding outfit. It is covered with lace and embroidery and she wears a hat, a posy and carries her gloves.



<sup>84</sup> Betty Roberts was Henry's Grand-daughter and this is told on page 30 of her book 'They all Lived in Lighthouses'

<sup>85</sup> 1901 Census shows that she married John TRIBE and they had a tobacconist's shop in Station Road, Horley & 3 daughters

The newly-weds seemed to return to Cranbrook without delay as there was no apparent reason to remain in Dover. Charles's home was at the bottom of The Hill (its literal address) on which the famous windmill stood just a few doors away and it was not long before their first child was expected. Sydney SMITH was born early in 1895 (1Q) and he was followed by four more children – Victor 1896/3Q, Reginald 1898/2Q, Frank 1899/3Q and Olive, their only daughter was born in 1902/2Q when Charles was an extraordinary 74 years of age. The photo (right) taken in the High Street, Cranbrook, may show the first three children, but it could also be the last three.

By 1911, Charles is 83 and the family still live in the same house which we now learn is a 7-roomed house on The Hill. Sydney has left home and Victor is a Telegraph Messenger at 14 years of age. Within four years Victor would be dead.

At the outbreak of WW1, Victor joined the East Kent Regiment (The Buffs) in Cranbrook and found himself in the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, No. T/1790, but the strange ways of the Army attached him to the 2/4<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Royal West Kent Regiment (The Queens) as they formed a 'composite Kent Battalion' on the 24<sup>th</sup> April 1915 and moved to Cambridge. They then moved on to Bedford on the 14<sup>th</sup> June before sailing from Southampton for Mesopotamia on the 20<sup>th</sup> July.

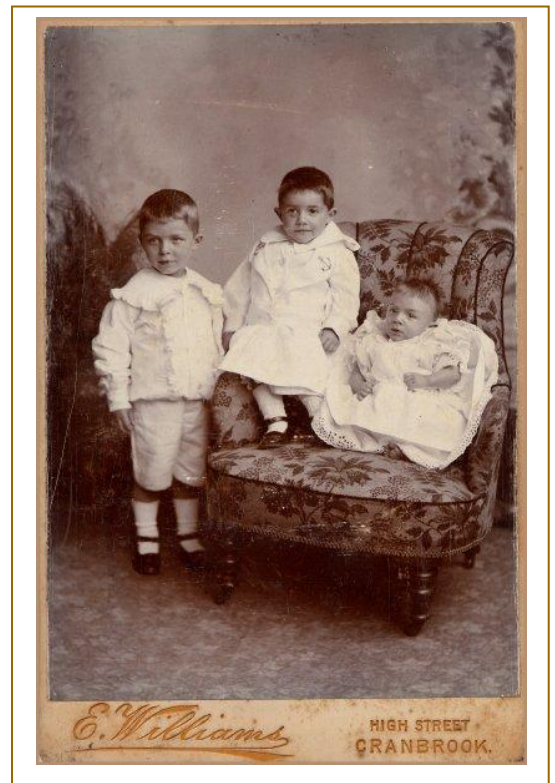
Lance Corporal Victor Smith landed at Suvla Bay on the 10<sup>th</sup> August 1915 as part of a massive attack which had devastating results and he died in hospital on Malta on the 18<sup>th</sup> September 1915 and is buried in the Pieta Military Cemetery.

Charles SMITH died in Cranbrook in 1921/1Q aged 93 years

Occasionally there are moments in everyone's life that can be viewed as a watershed, when something changes and life is never quite the same again. The year 1897 was one of those 'moments' for George and Catherine Knott, and it all began in the summer. Three things happened within weeks of one another, but it is not yet known which of the events preceded the other. One event was the family move from No.10 to No.7 following the death of the widowed Elizabeth Horton, but the reason for the move remains a mystery.

The next event was the marriage of Mary Jane to Bombardier William Robert PILGRIM RGA on Tuesday 3 August 1897 at the Wesleyan Chapel in Snargate Street, Dover and that marriage certificate would reveal which address the bride was using, The ceremony was conducted by the Minister Joseph Boulton and witnessed by George Knott, Rosa and Florence, but this marriage would inevitably separate Mary Jane from her family. On the 12 December 1899, the General Officer Commanding the Home Division authorised her inclusion on the 'married establishment' register. This effectively gave her permission to live with her husband where ever he happened to be and that the Army would be responsible for maintaining her. Soon after that approval was granted, on Saturday 17 March 1900 Corporal W.R. Pilgrim left Southampton on the SS GAIKA bound for St. Helena in the South Atlantic. Eventually Mary Jane would join him and they didn't return to England until February 1911

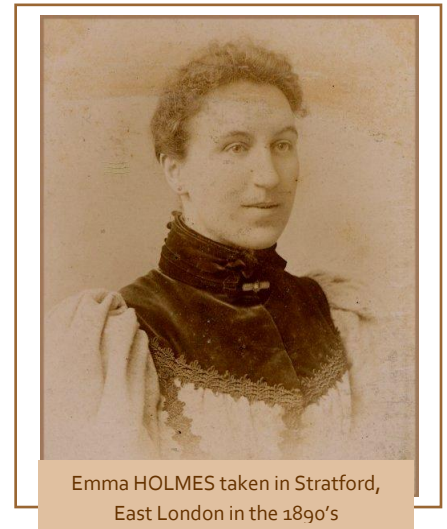
George and Catherine NEVER saw Mary Jane again.



Three more Weddings and .....

However, the third event that occurred in Dover on the 6 September 1897 that affected the Knotts was the opening of the new tramline from Buckland Bridge to the Harbour by the Dover Corporation Tramways with four tram cars. Walter found a job on this system as an electrical fitter's labourer (1901) at the tram depot, but a job was one thing, a wife was yet another, as he married Emma Amelia HOLMES towards the end of 1901.

Earlier in the year (April 1901) Emma was located at 23 Victoria Park working as a nurse in the household of a retired merchant navy captain Charles Wilkinson who had been born in Calcutta, India in 1829.<sup>86</sup> Park Avenue was an unusual street in that it was a long terrace of 26 houses that faced the wooded hill on which Dover Castle stood. There was little room for carriages and no stabling for their horses, yet their large rear gardens faced the harbour. The houses were often five floors high and occupied by most of Dover's upper class. The street was only a short walk from Castlemount Road and Walter's sister Florence was employed in another of the houses.



Emma Holmes was not a local girl. She had been born in Bermondsey in 1869, yet she was attracted to Walter Knott and they decided to marry and settle in Dover. Walter was still with the tramways in 1911 and had secured an improved position as an electrical fitter. They had also moved into a 5-room house of their own at 8 Rosedale Cottages, Manor Road in Dover and their lad Walter Holmes Knott, born in 1904/4Q, was to be their only child.

And so the story resumes in 1901, but the focus now switches to Florence, their youngest child, who had reached the matronly age of 26 and was still not married. The census finds her in domestic service in very interesting circumstances at No.3 Victoria Park in Dover, at the opposite end of the terrace from Emma Holmes.

The 12-roomed house was the residence of a Major General in the Royal Garrison Artillery, who had been retired for over 20 years. He had lived at No.3 since before 1891, when his cook at that census was Margarete McEvoy from Newry in Ireland. So it is interesting to ponder upon the possibilities that led to Florence Knott gaining an appointment as cook to that household. Did Mary Jane have a hand in it as a domestic cook herself, or did William Pilgrim get to hear of the vacancy on the regimental grapevine and pass the word to his senior officer that he knew of a reliable cook? Florence probably remained there until her marriage in 1904 and the Major-General probably continued to live at No.3 until his death in 1919 aged 87.

However, marriage to her long-time neighbour John Hamilton Clark came to Florence in the summer of 1904, but whilst the engaged couple were saving and planning for their life together, Florence's father George Knott died in the family home in No.7 Castlemount Road at the end of January 1904. Family bereavement in those days followed a strict code of mourning etiquette. Social occasions ceased and it might not have been thought appropriate to marry until the requisite period had elapsed. Books on mourning etiquette suggest that Florence should have dressed in plain black clothes for twelve months, yet that does not seem to fit the situation that we know existed, unless, of course, Florence married in black.

Florence was the youngest of George & Catherine's enormous family of thirteen children, yet she was the only one who indulged in a large family for herself. She had 8 children spread over 18 years with her husband John, yet both survived to a ripe old age.

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<sup>86</sup> 1901 Census RG13/838 Folio 30 Page 7



The introduction of Florence's wedding at this point has taken my story ahead of itself, so I must step back in the chronology to 1899 and another wedding, or rather a wedding anniversary – a very special wedding anniversary – a GOLDEN WEDDING.

On Thursday 19 July 1849, the two families of Knott and Goldsack gathered in the parish church of St. Margaret's @ Cliffe near Dover to celebrate the marriage of George Knott to Catherine Goldsack. Fifty years later they had eighteen grandchildren and this small piece was published in the *North Devon Journal* on Thursday 3 August 1899.

The following paragraph is taken from the *Dover Express* of (Friday) July 21st.

*"On Wednesday evening (19 July) Mr. & Mrs. G. Knott of Castlemount Cottages celebrated their Golden Wedding by inviting the members of Pentside Baptist Chapel to tea in the schoolroom, Mr. Knott being a deacon of that place of worship. The Rev. Mr. Dale, the pastor, on behalf of the congregation, presented to Mr. Knott a timepiece in the form of a lighthouse (Mr. Knott having been formerly a lighthouse keeper) and the lady members presented Mrs. Knott with a brooch. A very pleasant evening was spent."*

It may be interesting to those in the neighbourhood to know that Mr. Knott was the principal keeper at Bull Point Lighthouse for many years before leaving for the North Foreland in Kent. He is now residing in Dover after spending forty-three years in the lighthouse service.

There was more than one Baptist Chapel in Dover in this period and the Salem Chapel was the largest. The Pentside Chapel was the oldest and its congregation was known as *Particular Baptist* which is probably the reason behind the small group of 16 members leaving in 1839 to establish the Salem Chapel. Their new building was erected in Biggin Street in 1840 and enlarged in 1879. However it is not clear where the Pentside Chapel was located except to say that early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they moved from a building that had been erected in 1823 to premises in Queen Street vacated by the Congregationalists, but the chapel finally closed in 1909.

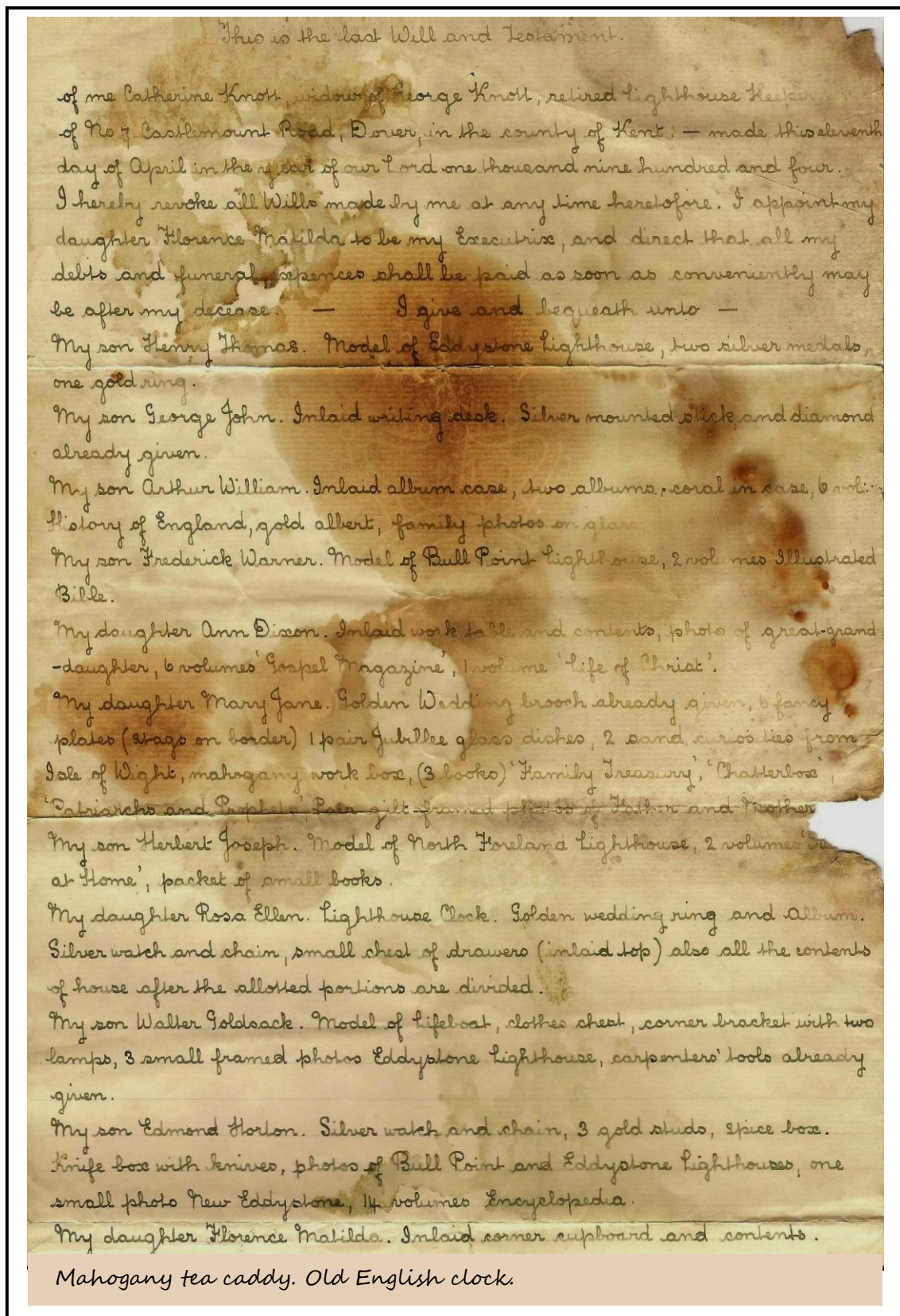
The photograph shows Catherine wearing a bar brooch, probably the one given by the chapel ladies, which, in her Will, she left to her daughter Mary Jane, but gave to her before her death, whilst the lighthouse clock was left to Rosa.



# The lamp is put out

When Dr. C. Wood certified that George Knott had died of 'heart disease' on Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> January 1904, it understandably took Catherine a little time to adjust to his passing and it was the 11<sup>th</sup> April 'in the year of our Lord' 1904 before she settled down to work out which family member should have which family heirloom.

The document illustrated below is not the original document. This document was not written in 1904 and neither has it survived too well, but more of that later.



A Transcript of THE LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT of  
CATHERINE KNOTT (née Goldsack) Dated 11 APRIL 1904

*This is the last Will and Testament of me CATHERINE KNOTT widow of GEORGE KNOTT, retired Lighthouse Keeper of No.7 Castlemount Road, Dover, in the county of Kent made this eleventh day of April in the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and four.*

*I hereby revoke all Wills made by me at any time heretofore. I appoint my daughter FLORENCE MATILDA to be my Executrix, and direct that all my debts and funeral expenses shall be paid as soon as conveniently may be after my decease.*

*I give and bequeath unto -*

My son HENRY THOMAS.

Model of the Eddystone Lighthouse - two silver medals - one gold ring.

My son GEORGE JOHN.

Inlaid writing desk - silver mounted stick and diamond **already given**.

My son ARTHUR WILLIAM.

Inlaid album case - two albums, coral inlaid case - six volumes *History of England* gold Albert - family photos on glass.

My son FREDERICK WARNER.

Model of Bull Point Lighthouse - two volumes *Illustrated Bible*.

My daughter ANN DIXON.

Inlaid work table and contents - photo of great grand-daughter - six volumes *Gospel Magazine* - one volume *Life of Christ*

My daughter MARY JANE.

Golden Wedding brooch **already given** - fancy plates (stags on border) - one pair Jubilee glass dishes - two sand curiosities from Isle of Wight - mahogany work box, three books (*Family Treasury: Chatterbox: Patriarchs & Prophets*) - pair of gilt-framed photos of Father and Mother.

My son HERBERT JOSEPH.

Model of North Foreland Lighthouse - two volumes *xxxxx at Home* - packet of small books.

My daughter ROSA ELLEN.

Lighthouse clock - Golden Wedding ring and album - Silver watch and chain - Small chest of drawers (inlaid top) - **also all the contents of the house after the allotted portions are divided.**

My son WALTER GOLDSACK.

Model of Lifeboat - clothes chest - corner bracket with two lamps- three small framed photos Eddystone Lighthouse - carpenters' tools **already given**.

My son EDMUND HORTON.

Silver watch and chain - three gold studs - spice box - knife box with knives - photos of Bull Point and Eddystone Lighthouses - one small photo of the new Eddystone, 14 volumes of Encyclopaedia

My daughter FLORENCE MATILDA.

Inlaid corner cupboard and contents - mahogany tea caddy - Old English clock.

## *A Retrospective*

With such a large family it was virtually impossible to treat everyone 'equally' and Catherine's division of the family 'treasures' reveals just a hint of her favouritisms.

It was inevitable that Henry, as the eldest son, should have the 'best' and it is interesting to note what Catherine considered to be the 'pick of the heirlooms' – the model of the Eddystone lighthouse. The two silver medals were a mystery, as the Trinity House did not award medals for long service. The mystery was solved in 2012 when the medals were put on display, along with the magnificent model of the lighthouse, by the National Maritime Museum at the Historic Dockyard in Chatham. The medals were awarded to George at two Exhibitions of Art & Industry. The first was in Plymouth in 1865 and the second was staged in Bideford in 1877, just before he left Braunton for Bull Point. The gold ring is most likely to be George's wedding ring that Catherine is passing on for safe keeping.

The first three boys shared the real valuables, but they were largely masculine adornments as they had belonged to George. Undoubtedly today, the most attractive item would have been the gold Albert pocket watch which went to Arthur, yet the diamond studded, silver topped cane would have been worth a penny or two today. It is quite surprising to see that the next and fourth son, Frederick (my Great Grandfather), received nothing of any significance, whilst Ann Dixon was allocated a 'silver watch and chain' and Edmond Horton a second one and these were probably fob watches.

The three model lighthouses are well known with photos existing of all three of them, but the model lifeboat was a surprise. Why did George make a model of a lifeboat? It is my guess that this was a memento from his time at the Bideford Bar Light as there is no model of that lighthouse. The Braunton lifeboat was kept in a boat house at Saunton Sands and was coincidentally not only named the *George & Catherine*, but was also new in April 1866, just as George had arrived.

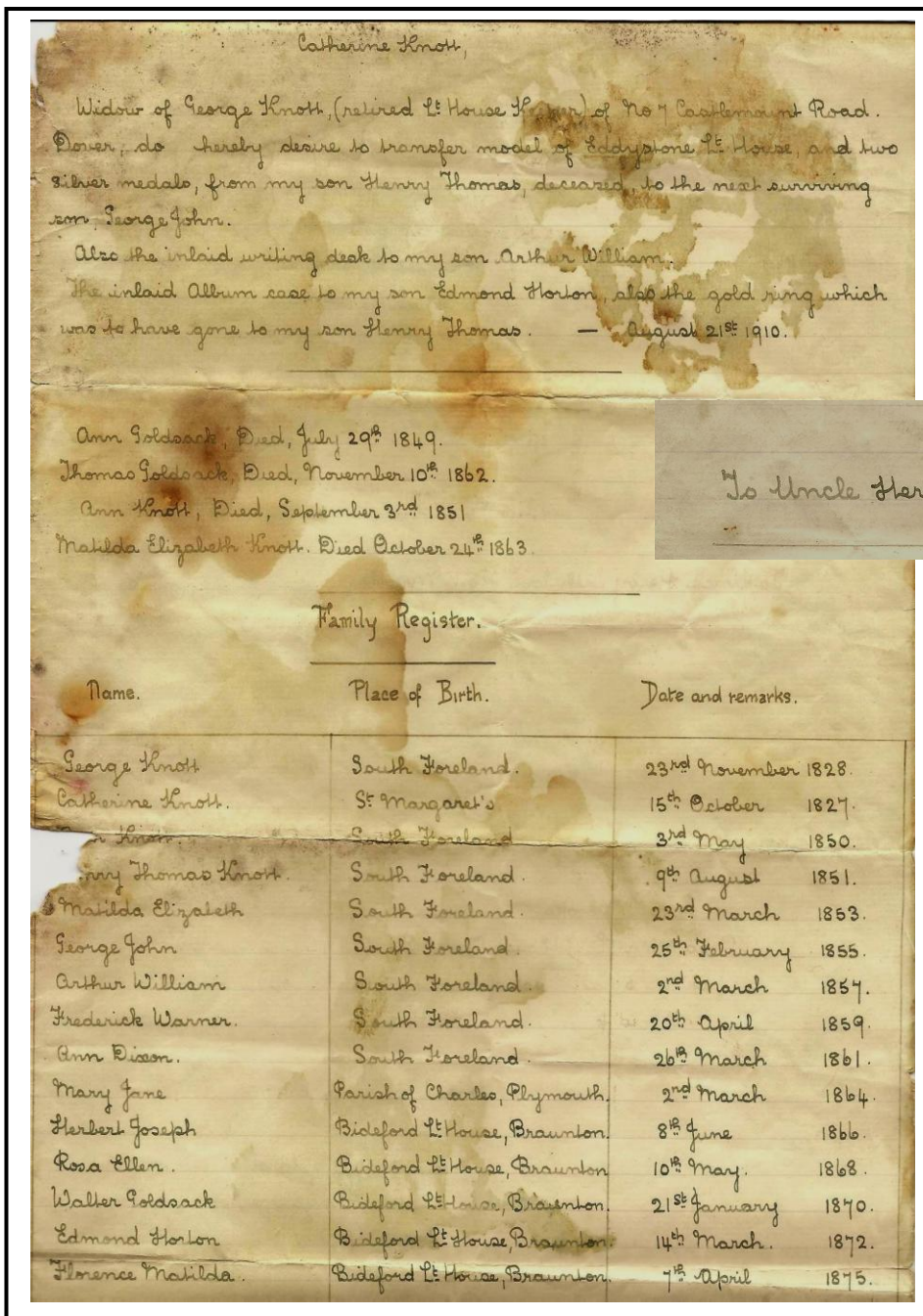
Of course a skilful craftsman in wood could turn his hand to anything and homemade furniture for the home was quite commonplace at the time. It is therefore interesting to note the small items listed in the Will that could have been made by George, for example the inlaid writing desk (to George John), the inlaid work table (Ann), the mahogany work box (Mary Jane), the inlaid chest of drawers (Rosa) and the inlaid corner cabinet (Florence). Notice how often the item was 'inlaid' suggesting an additional artistic skill as it was made lovingly for use in the home that his wife had created for him.

The mention of so many photographs spread among the family is tantalising whether they were photographs of lighthouses or family members. The mention of a photograph of an unnamed great-grand-daughter must have been Henry's grand-daughter Hilda Ballyn born in 1901, who we knew as Betty Roberts. The gilt-framed photographs of 'father and mother' beg the question: '*to which father and mother does she refer?*' Were they Goldsacks (Ann and Thomas both died before photography was common-place) or old Henry Knott and his second wife Margaret (could this be George's father and the photo of which I have a copy)? The inference that there was a 'Golden Wedding Album' given to Rosa is tantalising and it might well have been the album that my brother Ken acquired from an unknown source in the 1990's making it possible for me to digitally scan all the photographs it contained, some of which I have used in this book.

Several of the books that were allocated reflected George and Catherine's religious faith and it is interesting to note to whom they were given – Frederick, Ann and Mary Jane. Does this tell us anything about them? We know that Frederick and his wife Helen were inclined to be Non-conformist, and Mary's husband was a Methodist, but what about Ann? Surprisingly I have a copy of a book entitled '*The Life of Christ.*' It was published in 1894 and there is no doubt in my mind that this is a copy similar to the book mentioned.

So how can I summarise the family in the terms of Catherine's Will? Few people today would bother to list and allocate to family members such ordinary household items. Every member of the family was given something, although one or two of them seemed to fare less well than others, Frederick, Ann, Herbert and Florence for example. However, I will end with Mary Jane. She left England in 1900 taking her mother's Golden Wedding brooch with her and when she returned to England in 1911 she discovered two sand curiosities from the Isle of Wight waiting for her. I wonder who it was that visited Alum Bay and excitedly bought the empty glass receptacles from a beach hut and filled it with coloured sand gathered from the beneath the enormous cliffs within sight of the Needles Light..

When Catherine heard the shocking news that her eldest son Henry had died of a stroke in Crewe on the 24<sup>th</sup> July 1910, it was difficult to comprehend. Eventually she realised that she ought to alter her Will and re-allocate those items that would have gone to Henry. Inevitably George John was next in line so the model of the Eddystone Light and the two silver medals was designated to replace the inlaid writing desk which was to go to Arthur. The inlaid album case which was originally destined for Arthur was redirected to Edmond together with the gold ring that Henry would have had, but why was that? Why did Catherine ignore Frederick, Herbert and Walter in favour of Edmond? Catherine altered her Will on the 21 August 1910 - NINE days later she was dead!



To Uncle Herby with love from Myrtle.

### And Finally

This tattered, stained document was written at one sitting on a double page from a ledger. Its author addressed it on the outside and identified not only herself as George John's daughter, Myrtle, but also the person for whom it was intended - Herbert Joseph Knott - yet it gives no indication when it was written or even why it was necessary, but it has been a precious document for the family historian.

Original version - 10 August 2012  
36649 Words - 22 January 2021



