

Medieval Lighthouses

Part 6 - Ecclesiastical Lights

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ABOVE: The oratory at St Catherine's Point on the Isle of Wight is a good example of a structure that was an Ecclesiastical lighthouse. It was built for the specific purpose of assisting mariners.

The Light Of Christianity

The network of Roman lighthouses, a detailed description of which was presented in Volume 1, was perhaps more about the furtherance of commerce than it was about saving lives. As the Roman Empire went into decline, the very existence of the Empire became paramount and the Romans were less able to maintain an efficient network of navigational aids. This role increasingly fell to those with an interest in humanity and the saving of lives, a role adopted by people of the Christian faith, which was, even so, slowly assimilated into Roman society. Indeed, the fundamental basis of the society that succeeded the Romans, though it took much time to achieve it, eventually became wholly Christian in nature and, as we know, the headquarters of Christianity - in the 'western' part of Europe at least - became Rome where its head was the Pope in the Vatican.¹

And so it is necessary for us to examine the development of Christianity and the way its

principles were adopted both inside and out of the pre-existing Roman infrastructures.

Once established, the original pagan Roman civilization was far from proscriptive, indeed it was generally accommodating to all faiths. At first, the swings for and against Christianity were sudden and severe, depending upon the whim of the Emperor. It is true that Christians met gruesome deaths in the arenas, but as time went by Romans generally tolerated Christianity as long as it did not interfere with the day-to-day workings of government.

Jesus and his disciples were from the beginning embedded within the Jewish community, a vassal state within the Empire, but it was the mission of Christians to spread the faith to the wider world and those they called Gentiles. These difficulties of reconciling the day-to-day practices of Jews and Gentiles led to an irreconcilable difference between the two which resulted in the separation of Christianity from Judaism. A new kind of freedom came into being with the sea at its focus. Wilken, an expert on early Christianity, wrote:

“ All the major cities of the Empire were located on or near the sea, and the most vital lines of communication lay by sea. Ideas, goods and technology all moved easily upon its waters. Restrictions on travel were almost unknown and merchants and traders could journey from the Euphrates in the fertile crescent to the Thames in Britain without crossing a border or being asked to show a passport. Never before had so many different peoples enjoyed such a measure of security and freedom of movement.”²

In the first century after Christ the leadership of the church fell to Jesus' disciples and their immediate associates. However in the second century it became the norm for a single person called a Bishop to act as a leader in each region. By the beginning of the second century there was a single office of Bishop, of whom Ignatius is a well-known character.

During the course of the second century the principle of having one bishop for each city gradually took hold and by the end of the century had become almost universal. Bishops were no ordinary priests, they were leaders responsible for many aspects of their religion. They began to assume real power and exerted significant influence in their communities.

With our clear intention of establishing the history of lighthouses, it might seem strange to make a detour into religion, but as we shall see, I believe it was a vital precursor to the establishment of the system we are familiar with today. In these medieval times of immense insecurity and social unrest, it was not navigation but the humanitarian context of coastal lights that reminded the professional navigators of what they had lost.

Objectives

The objectives of this chapter are:

- 1. To examine the early spread of Christianity and its impact on humanitarian objectives within emerging societies and cultures.**
- 2. To identify the extent to which Christian missionaries assisted mariners.**
- 3. To list some of the earliest sites used for lighted aids to navigation.**

The Task

Any search of this kind in which we try to identify specific structures and locations suffers from a number of difficulties. First, is the sheer length of time that has elapsed since they were in place, a period of many more than a thousand years. Much has happened since then, and even though religious sites themselves may have been retained, they have generally seen much rebuilding as their activities have grown - rebuilding that took place on top of existing structures. In particular, in England, the well-known attack on the Church made by Henry VIII³ had very destructive results that has greatly diminished the amount of historical and archaeological evidence.

A second problem is that the period of our focus was in a time when populations were in disarray following the collapse of Rome and when there were few people with the motive or the wherewithal to make detailed records. Essentially, the only people recording history were members of the Church, and although these men were highly skilled and educated, their focus was on matters of faith rather than of history. This has resulted in a great poverty of documentation, even compared to classical times, and is one reason why this period has been called the Dark Ages.

The Role Of Ireland

At the time of the Roman occupation of Britain, Ireland, or Hibernia as it was known, was beyond the farthest boundaries of the Empire. But the borders were not sealed entirely and there was always irregular contact across the sea between the four 'countries' - Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales. The trade and other interactions inevitably introduced Christian ideas into pagan (mostly Celtic) communities, but there was no significant establishment of Christianity in Ireland until the fifth century. Until this point, Ireland had entered a period of comparative stability, its population entirely rural and dispersed, but based around a large number of local chieftains and their pagan, Celtic customs. However, Christian missionaries transformed Ireland's religious beliefs, legal systems, education, and art while also preserving aspects of Celtic heritage in a Christianized form.

It is well known that in 432 CE St Patrick was one of the first to formally establish Christian nuclei in

Ireland, although in 431 - a curiously convenient date - a man called Palladius (who died c.457–461) was actually sent by Pope Celestine I as the first Bishop to the Irish, a fact that indicates that there were already Christians living in Ireland. To some degree, history probably confuses the activities of these two men, since St Patrick's arrival was so closely matched to Palladius and argument remains about these dates. Neither is Patrick's exact birthplace known, but it is thought to have been somewhere in the British Islands. Whatever, these two men were effective in creating the first recognizable Christian missions in Ireland. We should note that it was not until 595 that Augustine was chosen by Pope Gregory the Great to lead a mission to convert the pagans of England, so we should regard these activities in Ireland as having a very significant impact on the subject of this book.

Clearly, the coast of southeast Ireland was a convenient destination for those crossing from Wales for there is reason to believe that a missionary called Dubhán arrived further east along the coast from the very important site at Ardmore in 452 CE (see p94). Today, the site is called Hook Point or Hook Head. Wilson explains⁴ that the original name of the location was Rinn-Dubhán, a point named after him. Unfortunately, a later misinterpretation of the word *dubhan* in Norman times caused the point to be named after a fishing hook. Nevertheless, it is this association with Dubhán that makes Hook Point probably the oldest lightstructure site in the British Islands since Roman times.⁵

Dubhán is thought to have created a hermitage at this site and to have exhibited a light that was used to assist seamen. This strong tradition seems to have been continued after Dubhán's death, by which time a nucleus of Christianity had been established here. Some scholars argue that a monastery was established here by St Dubhán, others that the saint is a different person from the Dubhán who settled here.

Monks are generally considered to have actively maintained a light on Hook Point for many years thereafter, and there seems no doubt that this was, indeed, a very early class of light that we call Ecclesiastical. It may even be the first that can positively be identified.

Besides this now being regarded as one of the earliest medieval lights in the world, another important factor can be attributed here, and that

is the collection of a small tax on those ships that benefitted from the light. This constituted a very early precedent for the financing of lighthouses that has continued to this day in the form of light dues (see p136). By whatever yardstick the importance of this site is measured, Hook Point is unarguably extremely significant in lighthouse history.

So, early Christian missionaries were to bring about transformative change in the British Islands. It could be thought that the skills of reading and writing coincided with St Patrick's arrival in Ireland.⁶ After all, it was Christians who carried the word of the Lord with them, as well as other sacred texts and laws that they needed to define their religion. It became entrusted to (Christian) monks to make the copies of the books of the gospel, Bibles and other works of learning, one of these monks being Bede.⁷

On his way to convert the Frisians in 716 CE⁸ St Boniface asked for a beautiful copy of the Bible to take with him because he wanted to impress the heathens. Missionaries who needed books to further their work had to send out to the publishers - perhaps the nearest monastery, where they could obtain a copy of whatever they needed. It was the eighth century when the interest in books became great. By the ninth century the idea of libraries was well established. These were not necessarily only Christian in content but collections of pagan works too. As one writer noted, "books moved."⁹

To us, it is perhaps hard to imagine the strength of calling to the religious life felt by ordinary people in the Medieval period. We should also understand the important difference between monks and friars.

As the Church in England developed through the Dark Ages, there was a long process of evolution of a number of monastic orders, such as Benedictine, Cistercian, Augustinian and others.¹⁰

Military Orders were also significant, although not in the context of marine safety. Monks and nuns made vows committing themselves to religious devotion in monasteries and nunneries belonging to a certain community and location.

At first, having renounced the trappings of wealth, all seemed fine, but as time went on, the power and influence of the monasteries over those communities resulted in the gradual acquisition of the trappings of wealth.

As the dependency of the local communities upon the monasteries increased and their poorer members began to observe a widening wealth

gap, there was a reaction whereby a new form of religious order came into existence and was called the *Mendicant Order*.¹¹ Its members were friars who rejected the monastic model and chose to live amongst the community, rather than separated from it.

The main groups of friars that emerged in the 12th and 13th centuries were Franciscan, Dominican, Augustinian and Carmelite and were committed to preaching and teaching the Gospels. Another group of mendicants who rejected the trappings of the monasteries were hermits who chose to separate themselves from the mainstream and perform their devotions in isolation. Where these people chose to live in hermitages along the coastline, it was often the case that the lights shown by their lanterns were useful as aids to navigation.

In a useful article on the subject of lights from hermitages, Rothera Clay¹² quotes the following from the time of Henry III in the 13th century. It perfectly summarizes the mission of these early Christian light keepers:

*"It is a pious work to help Christians exposed to the dangers of the sea, so that they may be brought into the haven out of the waves of the deep."*¹³

Early Monasteries Of The British Islands

The establishment of monasteries was the cornerstone of early Christianity in the British Islands. On p88 is a map showing the locations of the earliest monasteries, and on the facing page is a graphic that illustrates the approximate timescale over which they were established, a period that covers 300 years - the 5th century to the 7th century.

There are two aspects that stand out perhaps above all others. The first is that the great majority were close to the coastline, or had a good water-borne access from the open sea. In a sense, it parallels the model of imperialism that arose a thousand years later when explorers arrived at a 'virgin' destination from the sea, and came ashore to stake a claim on the new land where they were to conduct their first business on behalf of their sponsor. In each of these cases, the explorer was a single person or small group of humans - some of

whom later became canonized - made into a saint once they were dead - and who had been inspired by Jesus Christ to bring salvation to the pagans.

The second is that Ireland was by far the most favoured land for these first missions. It is very likely that Ireland, which had remained outside of Roman influence and had enjoyed a long period of Celtic stability was exposed to Christianity well before the arrival of St Patrick through trade and contact with Roman Britain and Gaul (modern France). Certainly, Irish merchants, slaves, and travelers came into contact with Christianity in Roman Britain and brought it back to Ireland, but figures like St Declan of Ardmore, St Ailbe of Emly, St Ibar, and St Ciarán of Saigir may have introduced Christianity to parts of Ireland before Patrick's mission.

So Ireland's early Christianization was due to early contact with Roman Christianity, stable societal conditions, effective missionary work, and the strong monastic tradition. While Anglo-Saxon England remained largely pagan until the 7th century, Ireland had already become a major Christian center by the 5th and 6th centuries. Once established in that land, these new Irish centres disseminated the new religion by travelling east and across the seas to the west of Scotland and Wales.

We might guess that in the earliest times there was an inclination to avoid those parts of Britannica that were under Roman rule and that they preferred to place their attention on the Celts who remained largely outside of the Roman influence. It seems clear that the initiation of monasteries in England, however, was at a later period and entirely on the east coast.

There is a clear conclusion: the introduction of Christianity to the British Islands was from the west, starting in Ireland, whilst the introduction to England was from another direction and another sponsor. We know that the Pope sent Augustine on a mission to Romano-Britain (early England) and that the first focus was on Canterbury - an initiative quite divorced from what was happening across the rest of the islands, which had at the time been initially Celtic.¹⁴

So, Christianity as influenced by the monks and monasteries played a pivotal role in the spread of the faith and the development of Irish culture. While exact chronological order and detailed records are limited, several monasteries are traditionally regarded as among the earliest founded in Ireland.



ABOVE: A summary of the establishment of the earliest monasteries in the British Islands. We note how the earliest were in Ireland, whilst in England they were generally later. Red balloons mark monastery sites.

Many monasteries were established near rivers, lakes, or along the coast for accessibility and sustenance. Their founders were often charismatic figures whose reputations helped attract followers and establish communities. And in these troubled times monasteries became centers of learning and art, hubs for education, manuscript production, and missionary activity. They laid the foundation for the “Golden Age of Irish Monasticism,” a period

in which Irish Christianity significantly influenced Europe.

The earliest monasteries were established as centres of Christian worship, education, and missionary activity during the early medieval period. These foundations often served as focal points for the spread of Christianity in their respective regions. Below is an overview of some of the very first monasteries in each country.

Ireland

Ardmore (Co. Waterford) was founded by St Declan in the early 5th century (before St Patrick's mission). Ardmore is often considered one of the very first Christian centers in Ireland, predating Patrick's mission. It was established in the southeast, near areas of Roman-British influence.

Armagh (Co. Armagh) was founded by St Patrick around 445 and became the spiritual heart of Irish Christianity.

Downpatrick (Co. Down) was also founded by St Patrick in the mid-5th century. Tradition holds that St Patrick established a church here that became a significant early Christian site and his burial place.

Kildare (Co. Kildare) was founded by St Brigid in the late 5th or early 6th century. Kildare became a dual monastery for men and women.

Clonmacnoise (Co. Offaly) was founded by St Ciarán in 544. Situated on the River Shannon, Clonmacnoise became a major monastic hub and a center of learning and trade.

Glendalough (Co. Wicklow) was founded by St Kevin in the early 6th century, known for its remote location in a glacial valley.

Clonard (Co. Meath) was founded by St Finnian in the early 6th century. Clonard was a key center for Christian education and it trained many of the "Twelve Apostles of Ireland" who went on to found other monasteries.

Inishmurray (Co. Sligo) was founded by St Molaise in the mid-6th century. This island monastery is known for its isolation and preservation of early Christian remains.

Bangor (Co. Down) was founded by St Comgall in 558. Bangor became a renowned center of learning and missionary activity, sending monks across Europe.

Derry (Co. Londonderry) was founded by St Columba in 546 CE. Derry was one of the earliest monastic foundations of St Columba, who later brought Irish Christianity to Scotland.

Wales

Early monasticism in Wales often involved small, secluded communities influenced by Celtic Christianity.

Llancarfan monastery was founded in the 5th century by St Cadoc. Llancarfan was one of the most prominent early monastic schools in Wales, producing several saints and spreading Christian

teachings across the region. Bangor Is-coed was founded in the late 5th or early 6th century, possibly by St Dunod. This monastery was a significant centre for learning and missionary activity in early Welsh Christianity. By far the most famous is St David's Monastery, founded in the 6th century by St David, patron saint of Wales.

Scotland

Monasticism in Scotland was closely tied to the Irish missionary tradition and the spread of Celtic Christianity. Perhaps the most famous is the Iona Abbey, founded in 563 CE by St Columba. Iona became a major centre for the spread of Christianity in Scotland and northern England. However, Whithorn monastery is often considered the earliest Christian centre in Scotland, founded decades earlier in the 5th century by St Ninian. On the nearby headland we find today an ancient stone tower still used as a lightstructure, but which clearly has a long and under-reported function as a navigational aid.

Another much-ignored structure can be found hidden in the back streets of Portpatrick. The structure is better known for being the bell tower and sole remains of a church, built in 1628-9. However, it has been described as:

"... a singular structure – quite riddled with windows' and 'there is a prevailing belief that it was built as a lighthouse on an exceptionally dangerous coast ... and it is worthy of remark that a similar round tower at the church of Cockburnspath also occupies such a position as this, looking out on the sea".¹⁵

A report on the archaeology of the site contains the following comment about the tower preceding the church:

"The other unusual feature at Portpatrick is, of course, the round tower. The evidence points to this being earlier than the present church and Gifford dates the windows to the 16th century. The local tradition that this was an early lighthouse or watch tower may be true but there is no way of knowing if it was a free-standing structure or formed part of a larger building. It was later incorporated into the west end of the church and used as a bell tower."¹⁶



ABOVE: This medieval structure is located on the Isle of Whithorn in Southern Scotland (see location on p88). Close by is Whithorn Monastery, founded in the 5th century by St Ninian. Whithorn is often considered the earliest Christian centre in Scotland for it was a straightforward landing place for missionaries crossing from Ireland.

BETWEEN: Even easier to access from Ireland is the small village of Portpatrick in present-day Dumfries and Galloway where an ancient religious site has a possible medieval lighthouse in its old graveyard.



Everything about this structure points towards it being of value to mariners and the permanence of religious sites would suggest that this site goes far back into antiquity as a crossing point between Ireland and Scotland.

Many early monasteries were established in isolated areas, reflecting the ascetic ideals of early monasticism. Another very early monastery was Applecross Monastery, founded in 673 CE by St Maelrubha. A strong Celtic Influence was retained by these early monasteries in Wales and Scotland that were heavily influenced by Irish monasticism, characterized by their emphasis on learning and missionary activity. These monasteries became hubs for literacy, art (e.g., illuminated manuscripts), and education, playing a key role in preserving Christian and classical knowledge.

England

Christianity had a foothold in Roman Britain, but most early monasteries in England were established after the Anglo-Saxon conversion in the 6th and 7th centuries. You could say that England had been left behind in the progressive wave of conversion to Christianity, despite the Romans having accepted it.¹⁷ From 410 CE, Christianity faced challenges during the Saxon invasions, which reintroduced paganism in many regions. Hence, it was not until later missionary efforts (e.g., St Augustine's mission in 597 CE) that Christianity regained its dominance in what would become England. St Augustine's Abbey in Canterbury was the first acknowledged Christian focus in England, founded in 598 CE by St Augustine of Canterbury, the missionary sent by Pope Gregory the Great. This monastery became a key centre for the Christianization of Anglo-Saxon England. Other centres then appeared along the east coast on the island. Lindisfarne was founded in 635 by St Aidan who had come from Iona. St. Cuthbert, one of the most revered Anglo-Saxon saints, served as Prior of Lindisfarne until 676 when, seeking solitude and a closer connection to God, he built a small oratory (chapel) on Inner Farne and lived a life as a hermit with prayer, contemplation and manual labour.

After Cuthbert's death in 687 CE, monks from Lindisfarne Priory would visit and occasionally inhabit the islands as places of retreat. Like much of the Northumbrian coast, the islands were vulnerable to Viking raids, which disrupted monastic life in the 9th century. However, religious use revived after the Norman Conquest and the Farne islands came under the control of Durham Cathedral.

A small chapel dedicated to St Cuthbert was rebuilt on Inner Farne during the 14th century. Bede's description of Cuthbert's anchorage describes a living quarters and an oratory. It is possible that the light from his oratory might have been seen as an Ecclesiastical light, though there is no clear reference yet found.

There are also indications that after Cuthbert's death monks from Lindisfarne continued to use Inner Farne as a retreat and that they may have been associated with an Ecclesiastical light. Whitby Abbey was founded in 657 by St Hilda of Whitby. This was a double monastery for men and women and was a major religious and cultural centre that hosted the Synod of Whitby in 664. This important conference aligned the now solidifying English Church with Roman rather than Celtic practices.

Two further monasteries were established in the 7th century by St Benedict Biscop: Monkwearmouth in 674 and Jarrow in 681. These twin monasteries were renowned for their libraries and learning, producing the famous Codex Amiatinus and being the home of the Venerable Bede, the "Father of English History." All of these very early monasteries not only shaped the spiritual life of their regions but also contributed significantly to the cultural and intellectual development of medieval Britain.

I am not suggesting that monasteries were responsible for the creation of lights to aid navigation. I believe that they were the focal points for the dissemination of new cultural norms. One was to "Love Thy Neighbour." The changes to the local cultures that resulted from the increased proportion of the population that could be described as passionately Christian led to a new sub-group of people who today we call hermits or anchorites and it is to these singular people that we look next.

Hermits And Anchorites

By the beginning of the fourth century, there is proof that the word *monachos* was being used in Greek to apply to people holding a sort of religious office. This is believed to be the origin of the term, 'monk.' Curiously, the original Greek word also carried the meaning 'solitary.'

Even earlier, it had been noted that members of religious communities were adopting particular lifestyles that involved refraining from cohabiting and adopting strict controls over food and drink. The role of priest - or monk - seemed to have become well defined by the start of the 4th century.^{18 19}

Individuals began to adopt strict lifestyles that involved solitude and self-restraint. Now the age of the hermit or anchorite had begun.²⁰ There was virtue in adopting a life of solitude so as to place a greater emphasis on prayer, but it was not a compulsory element of a monk's life.

As the new religion developed, so also did its practices. Thus members of the Benedictine order followed lives that balanced prayer with work and study. Members of Carthusian orders were focused on solitude and silence, while the life of a Franciscan monk was about poverty, preaching and service to the poor. Celtic monks, who were probably some of the earliest amongst the Irish, Scots and Welsh, were dedicated to missionary work, learning and asceticism.

During the centuries that followed the growth of the monastery period of the Dark Ages, there was a significant movement of emissaries leaving their *alma mater* and embarking upon remarkable voyages to find new lands that had previously escaped scrutiny of the Christian tidal wave.

The Irish told tales of extraordinary sea voyages that they called *Immrama*,²¹ in which monks and hermits sailed about looking for new havens of peace and solitude. Thus (outside of Scandinavia) it was men with a religious outlook who did the most exploration in these centuries of the Dark Ages. Christianity had given them a mission.

Monks wrote about their lives spent in islands of the north. By the time Vikings began to settle in Iceland around 870 monks from Ireland were already living there. There must have been a kind of alliance between these missionaries and the most experienced from the ranks of professional seamen for there is no doubt that a sustained period of exploration was conducted in which these

emissaries migrated to some of the most remote places on Earth. Starting with the many small islands around the shores of the British Islands, notably the far north and west of Scotland, these religious probes penetrated farther and farther afield to such places as the Faeroe Islands, Iceland and Greenland. And as they did so there was the possibility of conflict of interest between them and their rivals, the Vikings.

I am painting a picture of a course of human endeavour which stands out from the historical void of the Dark Ages as a singular force for change; sea voyages of purposeful exploration brought isolated groups of humanity into contact with the more distant world. In some instances it had a beneficial effect, and in others it could be catastrophic, but within these years of evolution we find Christian emissaries seeking solitude in remote places and keeping lights in high places that burned as symbols of devotion or other religious activity. These acts inevitably gave rise to lights that could be seen from afar. Whether they were deliberately intended to act as aids to navigation will probably never be known. Perhaps some were. However, there can be no doubt that their use, whether over long or short periods of time, or even under spasmodic supervision, surely invited navigators to make notes of the locations in their sailing directions. These logs kept by professional seamen would have been passed down through generations from master to apprentice, modified accordingly with each new piece of knowledge.

These activities represent what we call the showing of Ecclesiastical lights. There was no concerted effort to create a network of lights such as had existed in ancient times. This was a happenstance part of history that took place over centuries, but which gradually penetrated western culture. They need not have been deliberately planned to assist entry into ports, though that may ultimately have been a result. These were simply an occasion that, when offered, was an opportunity for a navigator to gain an advantage over his difficult circumstances.

In case you wonder if this Christian practice was limited to the British Islands, I can confirm that it was definitely not. In France, on Mont Saint-Michel there is a famous abbey, built on a tidal island, that may have maintained lamps or fires to warn ships of dangerous waters around the bay.



ABOVE: The round tower at Ardmore in Ireland which might reasonably have been used to show a light from its four elevated windows in medieval times.

Irish Round Towers

There are quite a number of tall, round, stone towers in Ireland, especially in locations where there were Christian monasteries and churches. It is tempting to suggest that some - those in prominent coastal locations, for example, may have been used as early Ecclesiastical lighthouses.

The towers were built primarily between the 9th and 12th centuries. They served multiple purposes, possibly the most significant being a defence against Viking raids. Attacks on Irish monasteries began in the early 9th century as they were wealthy targets full of gold, silver and religious artifacts. They provided a safe refuge for monks, valuables, and religious manuscripts. Sometimes, the doorway was placed high up - often 3 to 5 m (10 to 15 ft) - off the ground making it harder for attackers to enter. Once constructed, towers were useful for other functions such as bell towers to call monks to prayer. The towers later became status symbols of monastic power; building a round tower required significant resources and skill, meaning only wealthy and powerful monasteries could afford them. The towers often had multiple levels inside, which could be used to store manuscripts, relics, and treasure. But they also served as landmarks for pilgrims and

travellers arriving by boat. Although the towers were built at inland sites as well as coastal ones, it is clear that those that were in coastal locations could also act in that capacity.

It is clear that whilst it was very important to gain a fair warning of an impending attack by Vikings, it was also not a good idea to show a light that would attract them. However, we need to sharpen our appreciation of the timescales involved. Over a period of three hundred years, any given site might have been attacked only rarely and it would have proved extremely useful to have shown lights from these towers over years and decades between the periods of violence.

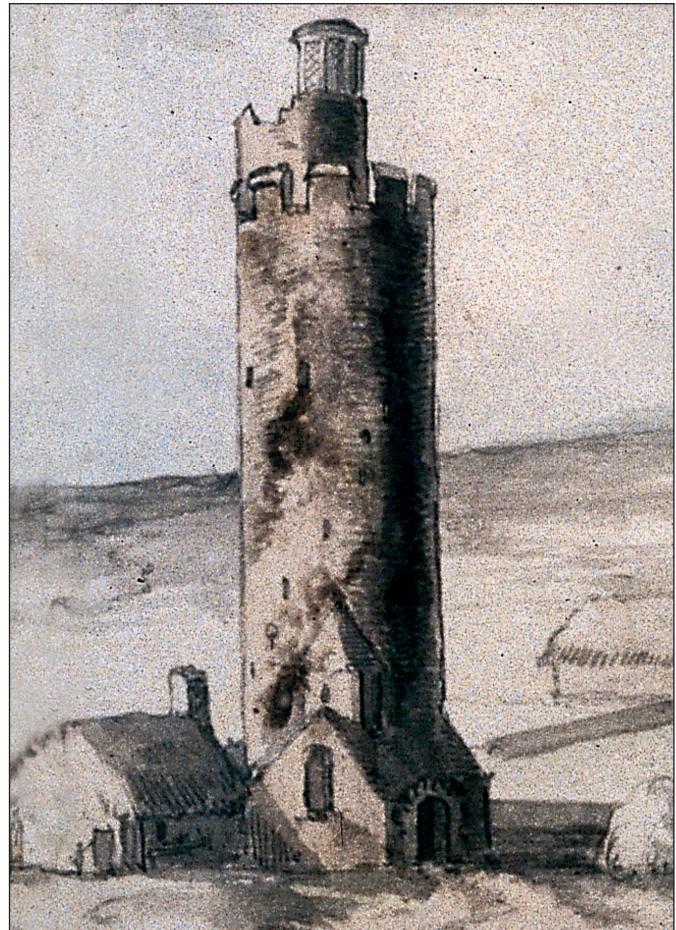
So, whilst there is no recorded history yet found that lights were shown from these towers, it seems more than likely that some were used in that way. For example, the Ardmore tower of Co. Waterford is a good candidate, very close to the coast and overlooking Ardmore Bay. It is one of the best-preserved round towers in Ireland, standing about 29 m (95 ft) tall. Another is on Scattery Island in Co. Clare, founded by St Senan in the 6th century. Others to be found on sites such as Rahinnane Castle in Co. Kerry, Killala in Co. Mayo and Kilmalkedar, Co. Kerry. But this is speculation, not proof. Perhaps they were just *faux* lighthouses?

Hook Point

This is a most significant location in pharology for it is strongly promoted as the oldest lighthouse site in the British Islands, a claim that seems to have no competitors. The tradition is firmly held that a Christian missionary called Dubhán landed here in the sixth century and set up a religious centre. Whether lights were shown at this point in the sixth century that were deliberately intended to assist mariners will never be known. Clearly lights shown from the site because it was inhabited could well have had a secondary beneficial result.

Naish writes that there is “good evidence” of a light being shown from a chapel on Hook Point (or Head) in medieval times, though he does not indicate the century.²² It is implied that this was in place several centuries before Augustinian monks were given the rights to take tolls from passing ships in 1245.²³ The site was still being referred to as an old monastic fire tower by the end of the 17th century, at which time it was finally enclosed by a glazed lantern.²⁴ Pharologist Douglas Hague wrote:

“There are several examples around the British Isles and one of the earliest and most important is Hook Point, Waterford²⁵, Ireland. This interesting building has the distinction of being the oldest lighthouse still in use in the British Isles. Most probably it was built by one of the Norman conquerors, Raymond Fitzgerald, some time between 1170 and his death in 1182. There is a rather dubious tradition that an earlier light had been displayed by the original community of Celtic monks at this site, but it is clearly recorded in 1245 that the Augustinian Canons who replaced them had the rights to collect tolls from ships entering Waterford, with the obligation to maintain the light. The rules of such a community made them ideal guardians, in contrast to some of the more austere and enclosed orders who were unable to undertake secular duties. The history of the tower in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries is somewhat confused, but it was held from the Crown by the Redmond family and the municipal authorities at Ross, although the light seems to have remained in the hands of the religious community at Churchtown. It fell into disuse early in the seventeenth century,



and in 1657 an unsuccessful petition was made by the Governor of Duncannon Fort on behalf of local seamen to get the light working again. However, in 1665 Sir Robert Reading, the lighthouse entrepreneur, was given the necessary authority.”

Stevenson’s opinion was:

“Two early lights were recorded in the south of Ireland. The earliest was shown from Hook tower at the east entrance to Waterford harbour. Tradition suggests that it was built about 810 by Rosa Macrue, sister of a chieftain named Strongbow, to guide her sons back to Ireland. About 1245 the warden and chaplains of the monastery of St. Saviour Rendeuan are credited with building the tower and maintaining upon it a light to warn sailors. The other Irish lighthouse is said to have been built at Youghal about 1190 by Maurice Fitzgerald who put it into the care of the nuns of St. Anne’s convent, which he endowed. They arranged for the burning of torches to guide ships into the harbour, a practice that ceased in 1542 when the convent was dissolved but was renewed later.”



ABOVE: The lighthouse at Hook Point in Ireland is a candidate for one of the earliest sites of an Ecclesiastical lighthouse.

FACING PAGE: The lighthouse built by Marshal before being modified in the late 1660s.

Around 1170, the region was invaded by Anglo-Normans who took over much of the south and east of Ireland. The Norman Richard de Clare, Earl of Pembroke (aka Strongbow) became Lord of Leinster. His daughter Isabella married the powerful knight William Marshal who succeeded as Earl of Pembroke and Lord of Leinster. In the early 13th c. Marshal began to develop Leinster. He brought in English tenants, founded the town of Ross for a port and built castles.

Marshal also built the tower of Hook as a landmark and light tower fuelled by coal to guide shipping to his port of Ross. The many skilled castle builders employed by the Pembroke estate provided the necessary expertise. In the 1240s we find the first historical references to the tower in the records of the Pembroke estate. These show that the monks from Churchtown had been installed as light keepers. Thirty acres of land near the tower were reserved for their use.

The monks presumably continued as custodians for several centuries, probably until the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII in 1540. By the 17th century the light was no longer tended and numerous shipwrecks led to calls from sailors and merchants for the light to be restored.

In the 1670s Hook tower was restored by Sir Robert Reading. He erected the first glass lantern to protect the coal fire beacon from the elements. Further improvements were carried out in the early 1700s.

The tower passed into the possession of the Loftus family late in the 17th century, and in 1706 Henry Loftus leased the tower to the local authorities for £11 per annum. The ground floor was used as a coal store and later by the military as a gunpowder magazine. Following repeated complaints from mariners about the poor condition of the light, the coal fire was eventually replaced in 1791 by a lamp burning whale oil.²⁶



ABOVE: A view from the south of Tynemouth Priory as it exists today. The castle built to protect the monks from attack is on the left. The site of the old lighthouse is close to the edge of the headland on the right. This view is from the opposite direction to those shown on the facing page.

Tynemouth Priory

Tynemouth Priory²⁷ dates back to the 7th century, making it one of the earliest Christian religious sites in northern England. The original Anglo-Saxon monastery at Tynemouth is believed to have been founded around 625 CE during the Christianization of Northumbria under King Edwin or shortly after. The monastery was destroyed by Viking raids in 875 which was common for coastal religious houses during this era. Later, early in the 11th century the site was re-established as a monastic community under Earl Tostig (brother of Harold Godwinson). Then, soon after the Norman Conquest, the monastery was re-founded as a Benedictine Priory in 1090 under the control of St Albans Abbey.

Over the next few centuries, Tynemouth Priory grew into a powerful religious and defensive site, with a strong castle attached to protect it from Scottish and Norse threats. The monks were known to maintain a beacon light to help guide ships—adding to its maritime significance. The Priory was dissolved in 1539 under Henry VIII during the dissolution of the monasteries.

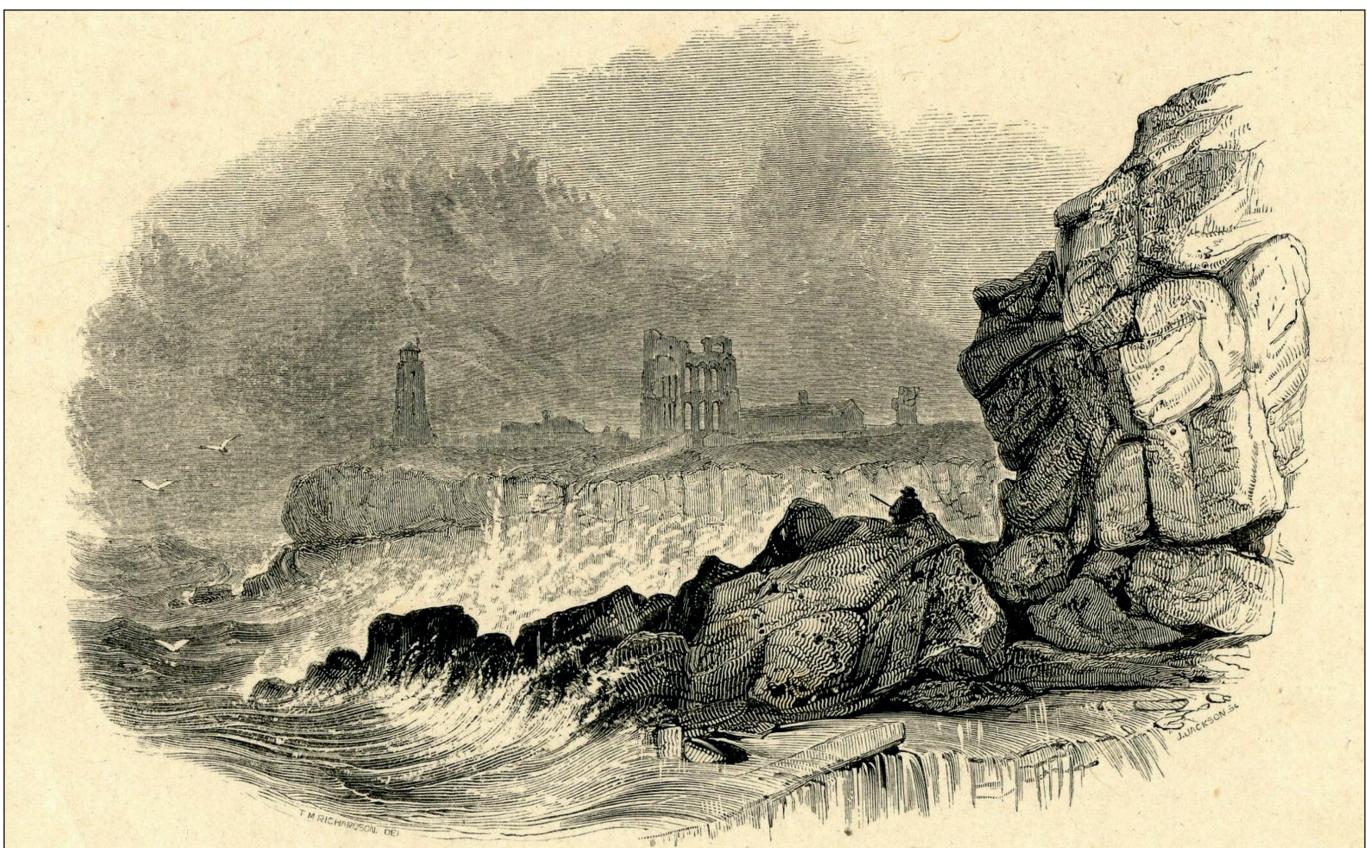
There were another two monasteries—one at Monkwearmouth and one at Jarrow—and while they were distinct locations, they were part of the same monastic foundation and operated as a joint monastery in early medieval Northumbria. Monkwearmouth was located at the mouth of the River Wear, in what is now Sunderland, Tyne

and Wear. Founded in 674 by Benedict Biscop, an Anglo-Saxon nobleman and devout Christian, the monastery was dedicated to St Peter. It was known for its stone architecture, Roman influence, and its scriptorium and library, which Benedict built up with books from continental Europe. The second at Jarrow was located on the south bank of the River Tyne, near modern-day South Shields, Tyne and Wear. It was founded just a few years later, in 681, also by Benedict Biscop and was dedicated to St Paul. It had its own church, and like Monkwearmouth, it was renowned for learning, scripture, and manuscript production. Though physically about 7 miles apart, the two monasteries were one spiritual and administrative community, often referred to as Monkwearmouth–Jarrow Abbey. They shared leadership, monks, and resources. Most famously, they were home to The Venerable Bede (c. 672–735), the great scholar, historian, and theologian, who lived and worked mostly at Jarrow. Thus these two sites formed one of the most important centers of learning in Europe during the early Middle Ages. They produced illuminated manuscripts, biblical commentaries, and histories—including Bede's "Ecclesiastical History of the English People", a cornerstone of early English history. Both have churches and ruins still standing. There was no direct administrative or founding link between Monkwearmouth–Jarrow and Tynemouth Priory, but they were part of the same broader religious and political landscape.



ABOVE: A view from the north: "Tynemouth Priory and Lighthouse" in a well-known painting by Thomas Miles Richardson in the early 19th century.

BETWEEN: A rather different view from the same angle in an engraving from the same period. The lighthouse has a clearer form.





ABOVE: Tynemouth Abbey by John Wilson Carmichael.

The need for safety of shipping on the northeast coast of England was great at Tynemouth where the fine waterway of the River Tyne facilitated the export of coal from the prolific coalfields of County Durham and Northumberland. However, not only was it important to mark the entrance, but the hazardous Black Midden Rocks posed a great risk to the safety of shipping.

The details have now been lost, but there remain two magnificent stone towers called Tynemouth High and Low Lights.

The site of Tynemouth Castle and Abbey is the most likely place where a light for shipping was exhibited. The early history of the site is not known and whilst it may have been used by the Romans as a signalling station, there seems to be no proof for it. However, its strategic location was chosen for a castle, thought to have been built by King Edwin of Northumbria in the 7th century. This led to a focus for early Christian activity and after three kings were buried there, became a place of pilgrimage.

By 800, a priory at the location was attacked by the Danes and this set the scene throughout the ninth century as the site see-sawed between periods of repair and destruction. Indeed, the following centuries saw many changes of ownership and affiliation and its detailed history is beyond the scope of this section.

The presence of a lighthouse at Tynemouth is famously depicted in a painting by Turner. The image here is an engraving after Turner's work by William Miller.²⁸ As we see from the pictures, it

stood on the far right of the promontory. However, we are confident that a light was kept here long before this lighthouse displayed its warning. A tower on the Priory is said to have shown a light from much earlier times consistent with evidence of such practices elsewhere. A reference in 1582 reported:

"The kepinge of a continual light in the night season at the easte ende of the churche of Tinmouthe castle, as in former times had ben, for the more safegarde of such shippes as should passe by that coast".

This was a coal fire burnt in an open brazier on the top of one of the two turrets at the east end of the priory church. The quotation gives a strong clue that the light had been shown still earlier. Indeed, other lights were definitely shown from 1540 at the entrance to the Tyne. Moir²⁹ suggests that the local Brotherhood that became the Newcastle Trinity House had originated at the end of the 13th century. We have no reason to disbelieve this for it agrees with other knowledge that mariners travelling up and down the country would quickly have shared useful practices executed elsewhere. Thus there is a good probability that lights were shown from this sacred site specifically to assist navigation from the mid- to late-1200s.

Queen Elizabeth's royal authorization noted above was for a private light, not maintained by the Trinity House but by the captain of Tynemouth Castle, Colonel Villiers, who charged 1 shilling from

every English ship and 3 shillings from every foreign ship. The first known owner of the light was Henry, eighth Earl of Northumberland. It was probably lit only at half-tide when the water was deep enough for ships to enter the Tyne, and this arrangement continued until 1659 when the stairs to the top of the turret collapsed. It was replaced in 1664 by the stone tower shown in the pictures. We know that it was a stepped stone tower of 3 or 4 floors beneath a conical roof. The light was provided by coal burnt in an iron basket. This tower survived until c. 1775 when it was partly or wholly taken down and rebuilt. From the Villiers family it passed to their relatives the Fowkes. In 1775 the old tower was rebuilt. Then in 1802 a revolving oil lamp with reflectors was installed in place of the coal fire. The lighthouse was purchased from William Fowke by the London Trinity House in 1836 and demolished in 1898.

St Edmund's Chapel

To conclude our story, we return to England. The image shows the remains of a late 18th or early 19th century chapel which stands on the site of a chapel first mentioned in 1311.

The present remnant, though in ruins, is much more recent - sadly there are no visible remains of the earlier chapel. However, this is an important site of an Ecclesiastical light because of its solid provenance. A chapel was erected here in 1272 in memory of St Edmund who landed at Hunstanton in 855 to be crowned King of East Anglia. He became the first patron saint of England.

The assignment of any location as an ecclesiastical lighthouse is fraught with uncertainty. How do we know whether monks deliberately set out to provide warning lights for mariners or whether it was simply stray light from the windows of the buildings that assisted navigation? In his excellent book, Long explains perfectly this difficulty.³¹

"To what extent St Edmund's Chapel was ever inhabited is uncertain. One theory suggests that it was the abode of a hermit. Others sources maintain that it had a small community of monks ... Either way, the site was certainly occupied ... the chapel quickly became an established seamark, the lighted windows at night proving faintly discernible to seamen in the darkness, effectively pinpointing for them the entrance to the Wash. It would hardly



ABOVE: A carefully tended memorial to the vanished remains of St Edmund's Chapel at Hunstanton in East Anglia. This site can be confirmed as having showed an Ecclesiastical light.³⁰

have been intended that St Edmund's Chapel should serve the additional purpose of a mark for sailors, and such a role would have come about more by accident than design. The dim glow at the windows came not from candles placed there specially for that purpose but from candles stood before an altar or placed at the foot of some statue. It cannot have been foreseen that men's lives would depend on the few stray beans of light escaping through the seaward facing windows.

We can never know the extent to which light emanating from such sites was a deliberate act to assist mariners. However, there was a follow-up:

But when this fact was realised, St Edmund's Chapel assumed an even greater significance, combining the role of shrine with that of navigational aid. From then on every care was taken to see that the windows shone as brightly as possible and the lights were tended unceasingly throughout the hours of darkness. The Chapel lights became a familiar and accepted feature of this coast, while on estate maps and sea charts alike, Hunstanton Cliffs came to be designated 'Chapel Lands.'

When ... the old chapel ... was superseded by a conventional lighthouse, that lighthouse for the whole of its working life was known to sailors far and wide as the Chapel Light."



ABOVE: St Nicholas Chapel in Ilfracombe. Unsurprisingly, the site is also called Lantern Hill.

OPPOSITE: This is still a lighthouse after centuries of use.

St Nicholas, St Michael & St Ia

A remarkable and little-known ecclesiastical lighthouse exists on the appropriately named Lantern Hill in the north Devon town of Ilfracombe. Stevenson is clear³² that the light in the St Nicholas Chapel was already established by 1540 and there is a record of a light being kept here in 1522. It has continued to act as a navigational aid through the centuries since then, as the inset image shows.

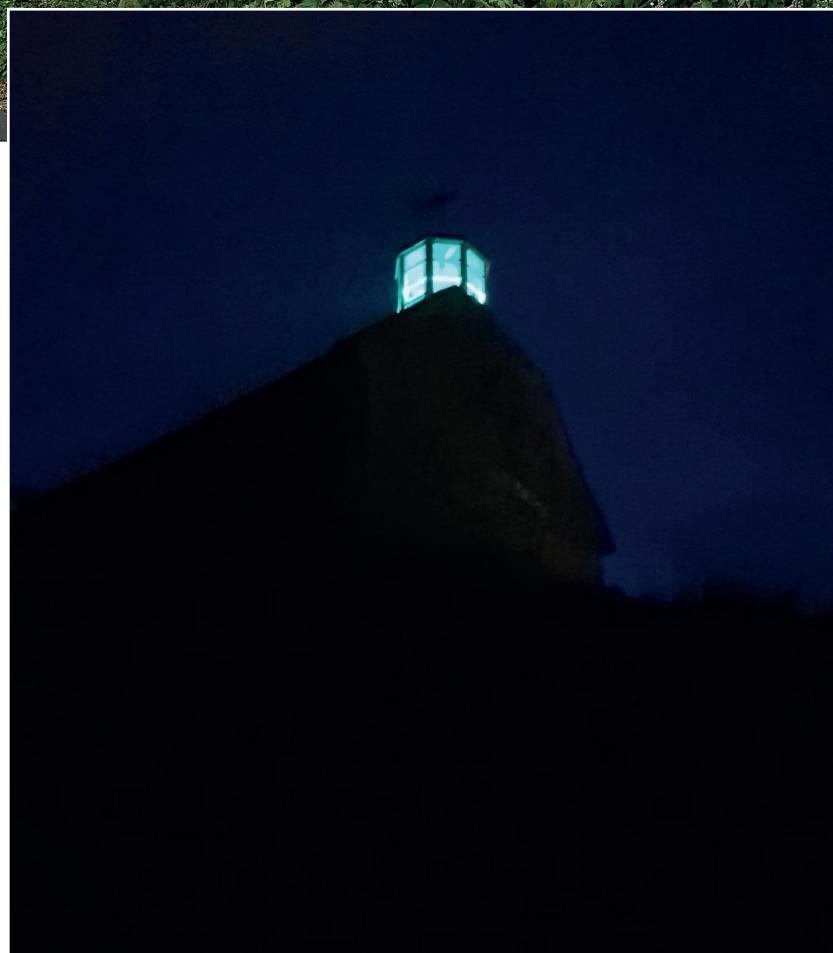
The long-established tradition of naming sites after St Nicholas³³ provides a strong clue about the locations of ecclesiastical lights. Nicolas lived in the 4th century in Myra (modern-day Demre, Turkey), which was then a major port along key Mediterranean trade routes so it was full of sailors, merchants, and travellers. As bishop of Myra, Nicolas would have been involved in blessing sailors,

protecting trade, and praying for safe voyages just because of the nature of the city itself. There are very old accounts from before the 6th century linking Nicolas specifically to miracles involving the sea. At that time Christianity was becoming more organized about “assigning” saints to aspects of life. Sailing was extremely dangerous and people wanted a strong protector. One famous story tells how the crew of a ship caught in a terrible storm prayed to Nicolas for help. Nicolas appeared to them in a vision, calmed the seas, and guided them safely to shore. Because of that, sailors all around the Mediterranean, especially in Greece and later Italy, started seeing him as their protector. His popularity increased greatly, first in the Eastern Christianity of Byzantium, then spread west when sailors carried his stories to other destinations.



After his death, his remains were moved to Bari in Italy in 1087, another important port city, and Nicolas became important to sailors there too. His reputation as the “sailor’s patron” grew in strength across Europe and many locations of significance to mariners were named after him. Some became the sites of medieval lighthouses.

At St Michael’s Mount off the south coast of Cornwall³⁴ there is another ecclesiastical lighthouse site dating from the 15th century. Once again, we find a Christian Saint associated with mariners, although, unlike Nicholas who was a protector





ABOVE: This church dates from 1630 and is in Venice, dedicated to St Nicholas (Sao Nicolo al Lido) see p239. The tower of an earlier church built on the site in 1312 was used as a lighthouse in medieval times.

of sailors, St Michael was often invoked by sailors because he was believed to lead souls safely into heaven after death. Since sailors constantly faced death at sea, Michael was a natural figure to pray to. Sites named after St Michael usually rise physically out of the sea or are surrounded by strong tidal waters. These dramatic locations made people associate Michael with the mysterious power of the sea. In medieval thought, the sea was often seen as a symbol of chaos. Michael, as the heavenly general fighting evil, was imagined metaphorically standing against the forces of chaos — including storms and shipwrecks. A very good example is the jagged, frightening outcrop off the Irish west coast called Skellig Michael. This is exactly the place we might look for the site of a medieval light and was indeed used as a Christian refuge and early monastery. However, in this case we have no evidence that it showed a light specifically for mariners.

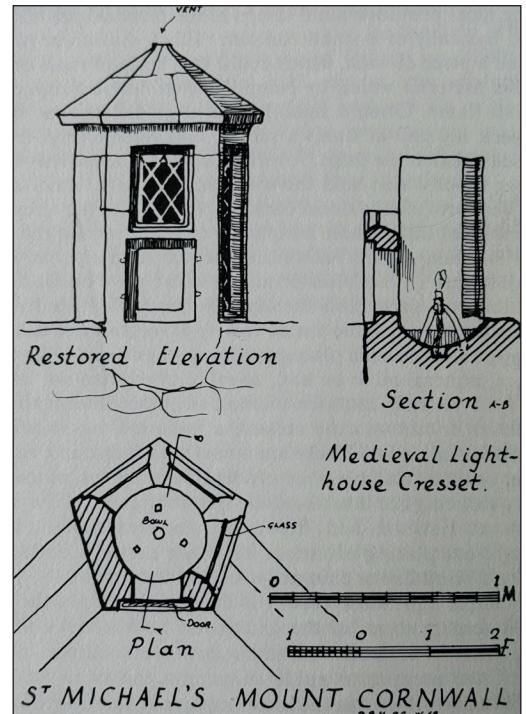
Monte Sant'Angelo at Puglia, Italy is a sanctuary where St Michael supposedly appeared in a cave. Although inland and not a lighthouse site, sailors travelling across southern Italy made pilgrimages here, especially before or after dangerous sea voyages, an activity that I described in volume 1³⁵ was performed in the earliest times by Greek voyagers.

Venice, being once a huge maritime republic, revered St Nicholas deeply. There's even a festival called the "Sposalizio del Mare" (Marriage of the Sea), and the church of San Nicolò at the Lido is dedicated to him. The tower functioned both as a bell tower and as a lighthouse during the height of the marine period of Venice. Sailors would set out from there, asking for his blessing.

Pharologist Douglas Hague identified the remains of an old lighthouse lantern on the southwest corner - diagonally opposite to the flagpole - of the church tower atop St Michael's Mount. Of the small amount of stonework that remains, Hague was able to draw the structure as it would have appeared in the middle ages and there is no doubt of its function.

Rame Head is another site named after St Michael. Its use as a lighthouse is tenuous but clear, resting on a single reference to a light keeper being paid in 1488.³⁶

So, what of St Ia? Well, after I realised that the ancient chapel at St Ives was also named after St Nicholas, I wondered about the naming of the town itself, named after a saint I had never heard of? I was surprised to learn that St Ives is named after St Ia. She was another Christian missionary who landed at St Ia's Bay having supposedly travelled to Cornwall from Ireland whilst floating on a leaf because she had missed the boat ...



TOP LEFT: The church tower of St Michael's Mount which in medieval times carried a lantern on the top left corner shown in the image.

TOP RIGHT: The lantern design re-created by Hague.³⁷

CENTRE LEFT: The Chapel of St Nicholas in St Ives.

CENTRE RIGHT: The Chapel of St Michael at Rame Head.

BOTTOM LEFT: The rocky crag of Skellig Michael. In the 6th-8th centuries it was a site for harsh monastic isolation, just visible top left in the image. Today, there are two lighthouses here, but we know not if lights were deliberately shown from here.



ABOVE: St Nicholas' Church in Blakeney Norfolk. The northeast turret on the right.

Anglican Churches

There is good evidence that supports the idea of a light being shown from St Nicholas' Church in Blakeney, Norfolk, to aid mariners. Blakeney Church is unusual in having two towers, a large west tower and a smaller turret on the northeast corner of the chancel. This northeast turret is not a common architectural feature for churches in the region. The northeast turret is hollow and accessible with stairs suggesting it had a practical use rather than being purely decorative.

There is a longstanding local tradition that a light was shown from this turret to guide ships into Blakeney Haven. Some accounts suggest the light was maintained by the church, possibly with the support of local merchants or mariners. Blakeney was a busy medieval port, especially from the 13th to 15th centuries, and its haven was notoriously tricky to navigate due to shifting sandbanks. The northeast turret of the church stands in a position clearly visible from the water making it an ideal

location for a guiding light. While there is no definitive record proving that the northeast turret was officially used as a lighthouse, the combination of architectural evidence, local tradition, and the maritime importance of Blakeney makes it highly plausible that a rudimentary navigational light or beacon was shown from the church turret, especially during the height of Blakeney's trading activity.

Other churches along the Norfolk coast have similar associations, although perhaps more as daymarks than beacons. For example, at Cley-next-the-Sea, once a busy port like Blakeney, the tall west tower of St Margaret's is visible from the sea, and could have served as a daytime seamark. The church of St Peter and St Paul in Cromer sits prominently above the sea and has the tallest church tower in Norfolk. Though not explicitly used as a lighthouse, the tower was used as a landmark for mariners. St Nicholas' Church in Great Yarmouth is situated right by the sea and there is historical evidence that the tower was used as a seamark for coastal navigation.



ABOVE LEFT: The modern lighthouse at Youghal was built over the top of the medieval lighthouse, RIGHT.

The Value Of Height

The association of gods with heavens (i.e. above) goes back to the beginning of human times. In Volume 1 I discussed at length how lights for religious purposes were shown from high points. This fundamental element of religion was translated into Christianity too. The use of high elevations in Christian architecture, such as church towers and steeples, symbolized a connection to the heavens and closeness to God. The practice reflects theological and symbolic intentions rooted in Christian beliefs. Height was seen to represent transcendence, aspiring to reach the divine. Even today tall structures draw the eyes upward, and in the past it was considered to encourage thoughts of God and the heavens.

In the Bible mountains and elevated places often served as meeting points between God and humanity (e.g., Mount Sinai, Mount Zion). Building churches on hills or incorporating vertical elements was seen as symbolically recalling these sacred encounters. Elevated towers made churches visible from afar, establishing them as landmarks of faith and community centers, literally and spiritually towering over their surroundings. Bell towers helped amplify the sound of church bells, calling worshipers to prayer and marking time in both religious and secular life. This connection between height and spirituality was not unique to Christianity, but in Christian architecture, high elevations carry profound symbolic meaning, reflecting humanity's

desire to connect with the divine. It is an obvious conclusion to make that the Ecclesiastical lights were mostly shown from high elevation. With the primary aim of such a light being a religious function, it served the Lord well if a secondary result was to assist people making their way in the dangerous darkness of the seas. Thus we would not usually associate Ecclesiastical lights with harbour lights.

An exception to my last statement would be the medieval lighthouse at Youghal in Ireland. A lighthouse is clearly an important part of the character of the small southern Irish town of Youghal for one appears on the town's coat-of-arms. Although the town was formally incorporated in 1209, the site was inhabited long before that and there is archaeological evidence for Viking settlements nearby. The Vikings apparently used their base for raids on Christian sites in the vicinity. Indeed, it is the Christian members of a community in Youghal who are credited with showing a light to assist mariners into the harbour. It seems that this early religious community grew significantly, for a church dedicated to St Mary was built in 1220 by Meiler de Bermingham, and he also founded the Dominican Priory in Youghal around the same time. The St Mary Collegiate church remains in use to this day. However, history tells us that there was also a convent dedicated to St Anne on the site of the present lighthouse (built 1848-52) and it was nuns from there who set up a medieval lighthouse in 1190, possibly influenced by the showing of a light at Hook Point just 64 km (40 mi) away.

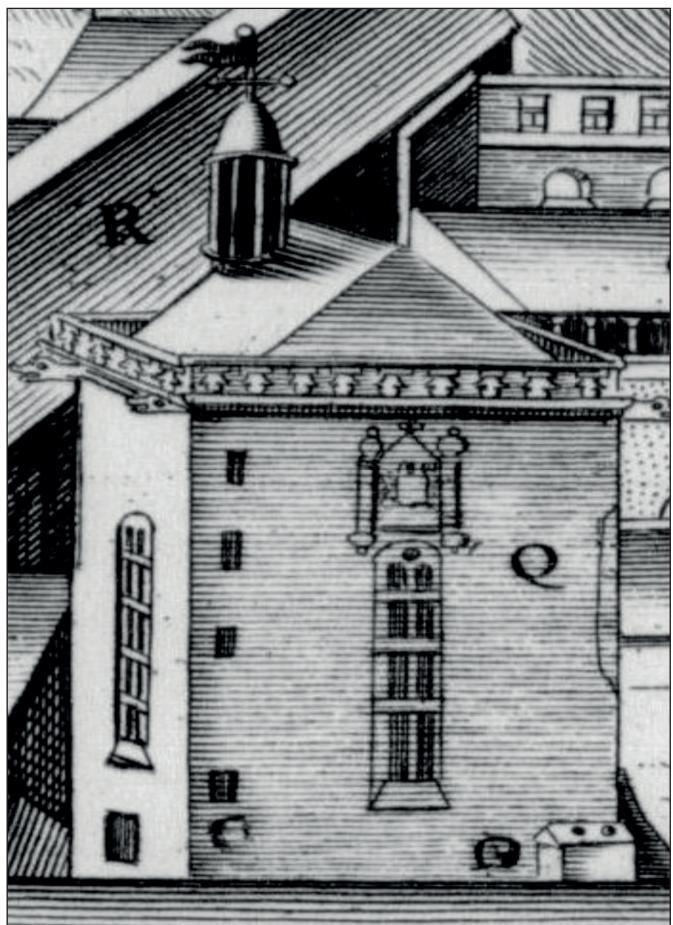


ABOVE: The Benedictine abbey on Pointe Saint-Mathieu lit a permanent fire to warn ships of the dangerous Finistère promontory. The old square tower used to carry the light can be seen directly behind the modern lighthouse. The white tower on the left is for the coastguard.

RIGHT: An old engraving of the monastery tower with the lantern mounted on the roof.

Ecclesiastical Lights In Europe

Christian churches and monasteries across Europe often provided vital visual aids to mariners before modern lighthouses. From the early Middle Ages through the Renaissance, abbeys, cathedrals and chapels on coasts and river estuaries sometimes maintained fires or lanterns expressly to guide ships. The practice varied by region and era, but numerous examples survive in chronicles and archaeological records. In many cases clergy or religious orders tended the lights; in others, secular patrons built chapels or beacons with church involvement. Next we survey some key examples by region.



Atlantic And Mediterranean

A rare example of an Atlantic Ocean light is to be found at the abbey of Saint-Mathieu in Finistère, northwest France. From at least the 13th century, the Benedictine abbey on Pointe Saint-Mathieu lit a permanent fire to warn ships of the dangerous Finistère promontory. A monastic chronicle of 1681 notes that the abbey's "high square tower" bore a lantern "in which formerly a torch was lit as a guide for mariners," and that the abbey enjoyed wreck rights (*droit de bris*) to fund it.³⁸ Later accounts confirm that monks kept a "signal fire" on this tower from the 1200s onward.³⁹

In 1692, French pilots petitioned Louis XIV to rebuild the abbey tower's beacon "to ensure the safety of ships approaching the military port of Brest." Thus Saint-Mathieu's light was explicitly navigational, and monks bore responsibility for lighting and maintenance (though the crown eventually assumed control in the 17th c.)

The Torre della Lanterna at Messina, aka Tower of San Raineri, was built in 1559–60 and stands on the ruins of a 13th c. monastery of San Raineri. Traditionally, St Rainerius lit bonfires in the 12th c. explicitly for navigation. Later, a Renaissance lighthouse replaced the medieval light.

Elsewhere at Mediterranean sites lighthouses were built as civic projects and these will be discussed in other chapters. However, some coastal churches served *ad hoc* beacon roles. For example, Venetian accounts mention monks at sanctuaries of St. Nicholas on both Zakynthos and Cyprus lighting beacons at night for Aegean mariners.⁴⁰ In general, compared to northern and western Europe, southern Europe saw fewer church-towered lights, relying more on classical towers or harbour lights built by merchants and states. On Zakynthos, St Nicholas of the Wharf (Agios Nikolaos tou Molou) was the main sailors' church of the town port, founded around the mid-16th century in the Venetian period. Located directly on the mole, it served as a navigational landmark, highly important for approaching ships. It was a place of prayer and offerings for sailors and captains, and certainly aided navigation visually, perhaps with occasional or accidental lights, but no permanent beacon has been documented.

The Monastery of St Nicholas of the Cats is located at Cape Gata in southern Cyprus. According to tradition it was founded in the early 4th century,

during or shortly after the reign of St Helena (mother of Emperor Constantine). Legend says that Helena brought cats to the monastery from Egypt or Constantinople to control the plague of snakes infesting the area. Thereafter, monks kept cats and may have kept lights as well. The monastery was rebuilt several times. A connection with the maritime is vague, but once again, we find the assignment of St Nicholas to a prominent headland and it seems very likely that the monastery at the very least served as a landmark for sailors approaching southern Cyprus.

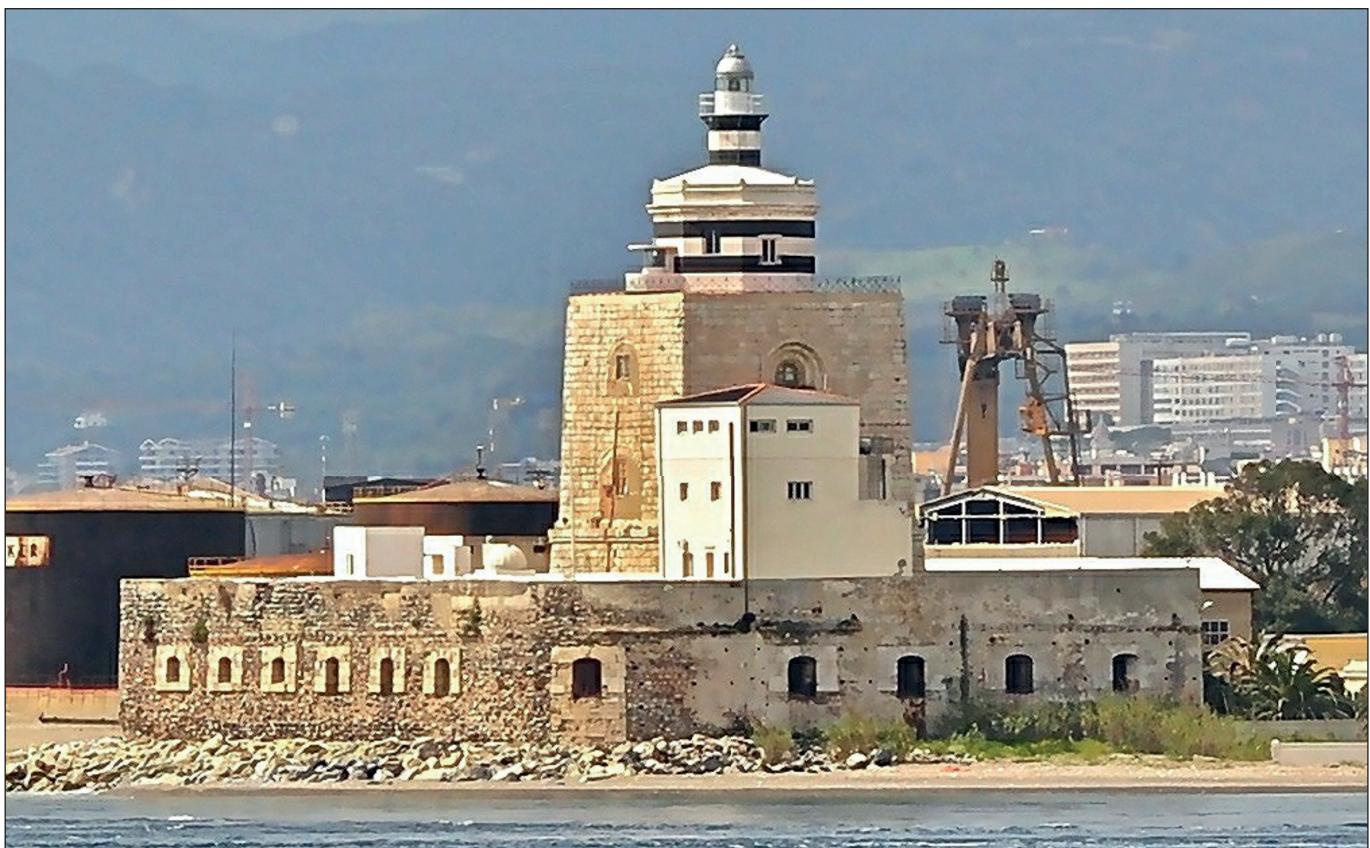
Spanish and Portuguese coasts have little direct evidence of medieval church-run lights.

Scandinavia And The Baltic Coasts

In the Baltic region, whitewashed stone cairns or crosses from as early as the 11th c. served as unlit daymarks and dedicated fire beacons were rarer until later. Surviving records mainly mention natural features or plain towers. Nevertheless, even here religious sites did play roles: Finland's pre-modern sailing guides note church towers and coastal chapels as "visible landmarks" for navigation and signal fires on hilltops ("baler") were lit to guide sailors in archipelagos. For example, 14th 15th c. pilot manuals refer to the painted churches of Åland and Uppland as range-markers, and mention lit "day-mark" beacons (pooki). Thus in the Baltic and North Sea countries, tall churches anchored the charts, supplemented by occasional bonfires.

In many cases the duty of lighting and watching the beacon fell to church personnel. The St-Mathieu abbey chronicle explicitly credits the Benedictine monks with tending the fire (Eine Abtei am Ende der Welt), and French accounts say "[i]nitially, it was the Benedictine monks who were responsible for the care of the fire." Similarly, Messina's medieval bonfires were kept by friars on the old tower. Local priests often collected special dues to fund these lights: Winchelsea (England) had harbour dues from 1261, and Hiddensee's abbey probably drew on its endowments to build the Gellen beacon in 1306.⁴¹

Often the church's charitable role was balanced by legal rights. At Saint-Mathieu, for centuries the abbey's wreckage rights financed the beacon. In 1630 Louis XIII reassigned those wreck rights to the crown (through Richelieu) specifically because



ABOVE: The Medieval lighthouse site at Messina.

the abbey was profiting from shipwrecks near its own light. Elsewhere, medieval pious foundations or monastic orders endowed chapels with stipends for lamps (e.g. votive lights for sailors), but direct church-run beacons were usually sustained by such rescue or harbour fees.

Many lights were clearly intended for navigation. The St-Mathieu lantern was lit “for the benefit of mariners,” and Dutch pilots’ petition about Oostvoorne describes the church beacon as “for all fishing and merchant ships.” Likewise, Walter de Godeton’s 14th c. penance required a chaplain to keep a light in St. Catherine’s Oratory “for the benefit of mariners.” Even when church buildings predated navigational needs, the coasts they crowned often made them *de facto* lighthouses.

The practice was most common in northern and western Europe. In the Mediterranean, classical towers (often state-built) dominated, though Mediterranean monasteries did occasionally light beacons. Structures specifically called “monastery lighthouses” are recorded in Venetian-era sources. Along the Atlantic and North Sea, where long low coasts made fires more vital, coastal parishes and abbeys frequently took up the task. Scandinavian

coasts relied more on non-ecclesiastical markers until later centuries, but church towers still marked early port routes.

By the 17th century, states and navies began to replace ecclesiastical beacons. For instance, after the St-Mathieu lantern ceased to be under abbey control, the French Crown in 1835 built the modern lighthouse shown in the image on p106. However, until then the evidence shows a remarkable continuity: monks and priests lighting fires on church towers or island chapels to save sailors from shipwreck.

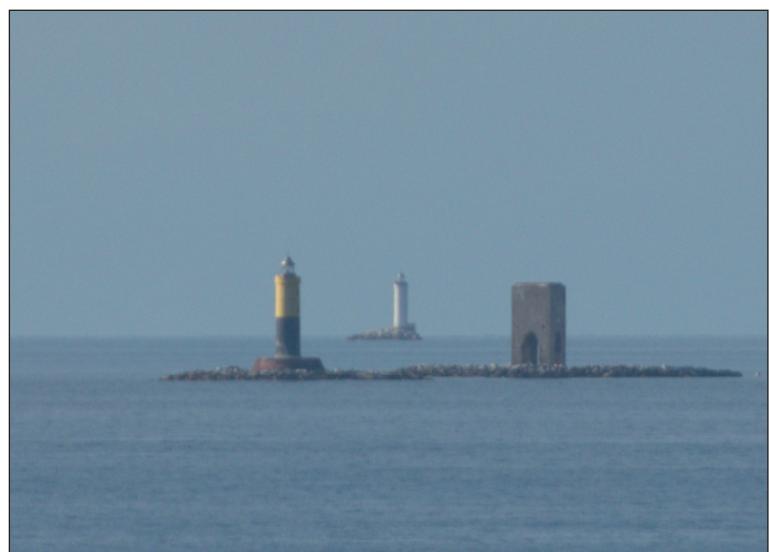
I have constantly asked myself who named these locations that mattered so much to mariners and other sea travellers. Was it the monks or the mariners? Though there is no proof, I conclude that it was the monks or clergy who applied the names of Saints to the sites they would select for their places of worship. Monks were seen as intermediaries between heaven and earth, so by assigning a saint to a place, they effectively claimed it for God and gave it a Christian identity. Managing a light or a chapel under a saint’s protection was both a religious duty and a practical aid to mariners, which gave monks a very respected place in maritime culture.



TOP: In Italy on Tino Island is found the Sanctuary of San Venerio, named after St Venerius, a 6th-century hermit who is said to have kept a fire to help mariners. He became the patron saint of lighthouse keepers.

CENTRE: At Lérins Abbey on the French Mediterranean Coast the monastery had a watchtower that may have also been used for navigation.

RIGHT: The Torre della Meloria in Italy was originally built by monks and served as both a watchtower and a beacon to warn ships of the Meloria shoals. Today it remains adjacent to two modern lighthouses.





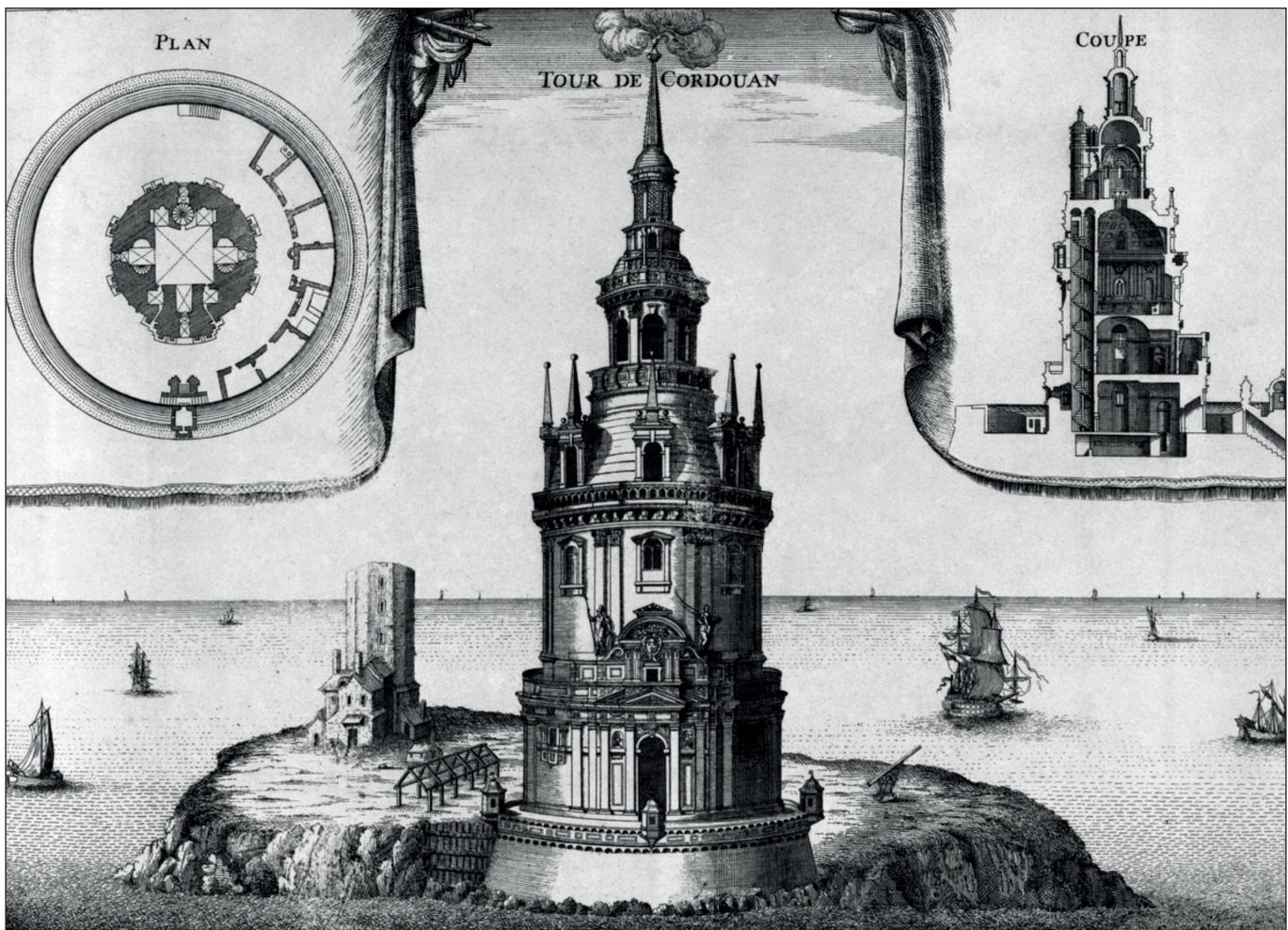
ABOVE: Cordouan lighthouse in present times is essentially the fourth 'structure' and was built by Joseph Teulère. At low tides, there are extensive sandbanks that make navigation extremely hazardous when they disappear beneath shallow waters. Closer to the lighthouse the area becomes much more rocky and is a distinct island, now much smaller than was present in earlier centuries.

Cordouan

Extensive reefs and sandbanks at the mouth of the River Gironde that leads to Bordeaux have been a navigational hazard for many centuries. Today, visitors can experience one of the most wonderful lighthouse sites as the present structure is, arguably, the world's finest lighthouse.

But Cordouan was first inhabited by hermits and monks. A charter of 1088 of the Abbey of Cluny (a major reformist Benedictine order in Burgundy) records that an abbot, Etienne and a prior, Ermenaud had settled on the island for solitude. These early hermits were reportedly concerned about shipwrecks and may have shown warning lights or rung bells, though there's no definitive record of a formal beacon at this early stage. Thus, There is circumstantial evidence that an ecclesiastical light may have been exhibited informally on the island by monks or hermits from around 1080.

It is said that the two men later abandoned Cordouan because mariners were mistaking their lights or bell-ringing for navigational signals and that it may have led to shipwrecks. This sense of guilt caused them to relocate to the Pointe de Grave on the south shore where they established a priory tasked with spiritual oversight of the region, including Cordouan Island.⁴² Historical charters actually name Abbot Étienne and Prior Ermenaud as involved. The 1092 foundation of the priory of nearby Soulac names Étienne as the "hermit of Cordouan." The priory at Pointe de Grave did not replace Cordouan as a beacon site; it was a base on the mainland for the religious custodians of the island. Even after their departure from living on the island full-time, the monks would have retained jurisdiction over Cordouan and its ecclesiastical functions.



ABOVE: This engraving includes the only representation of the 1360 tower (Cordouan 2) alongside the later design of de Foix (Cordouan 3). Perhaps most surprising is that the island is shown to be significantly above water, in contrast to the low height shown on the facing page. The older tower is clearly octagonal and would have carried an open brazier.

We cannot be certain if the island was marked by lights continuously thereafter. It was clearly necessary, and if the ecclesiastical light (Cordouan 1) was later extinguished, a new lightstructure must have been demanded.

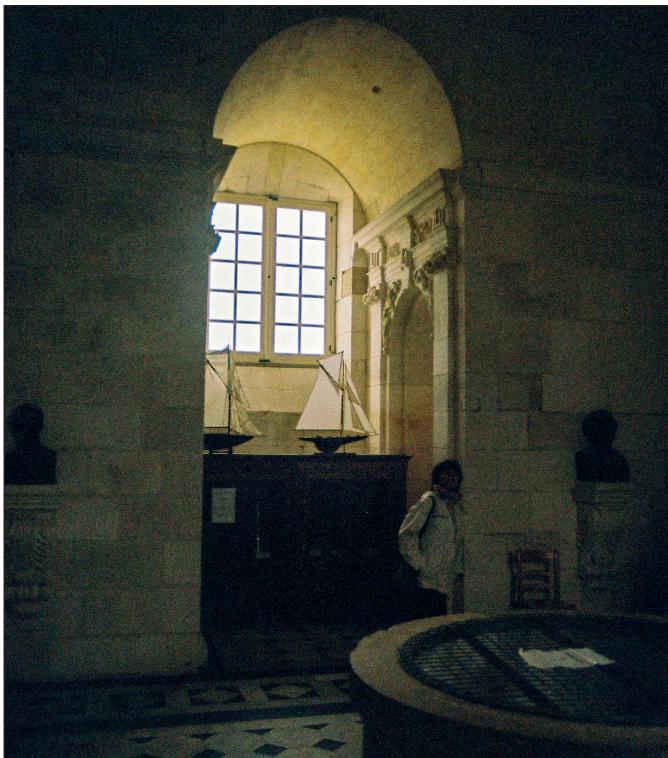
A second light was built at the orders of the English Black Prince, Edward of Woodstock (1330–1376), the eldest son of King Edward III and heir apparent to the English throne. It may be surprising to some readers that England held large areas of present-day France, which included the Aquitaine region.⁴³ It seems that the Prince was keen to stimulate the trade in Bordeaux and so he ordered the building of a new lighthouse to improve navigation.

By 1360 a purpose-built stone beacon tower had been constructed directly on Cordouan Island. It was staffed again by religious hermits under the spiritual or administrative authority of the priory at

Pointe de Grave. This tower included a platform at the top with a fire brazier, and a hermit was once again assigned to maintain it nightly. The 1409 tax account by Gaspardus de Lasparre, “hermit of Notre-Dame de Cordouan”, shows that the tower was in operation and functioning as a navigational aid, with dues collected from ships passing nearby. These would only be levied if a light were visible and functioning from that location. So from the mid-14th century onward we are sure that a light was regularly shown from a dedicated beacon tower on the island.

The engraving above, besides including the only known image of Cordouan 2, shows the design made by Louis de Foix (I am referring to this as Cordouan 3) when, at the end of the sixteenth century, he rebuilt the lighthouse completely on adjacent land.

I have pointed out in my images that Cordouan



Island was larger and drier in earlier centuries than it is today: it was more than just a rocky shoal but a true tidal island, with higher and broader exposed land during low and medium tides.⁴⁴ The fact that monks and hermits were living there, implies that there was sufficient space to walk, grow food, and build structures, including a chapel and a small cemetery. Louis de Foix's 16th-century construction (1593–1611) involved substantial building platforms on dry land, and he probably lived on the island for months at a time during construction seasons. Engravings and early maps show rocky ground and beaches around the base of the lighthouse not just open water. Clearly, Cordouan has gradually reduced in size due to a combination of sea-level rise, erosion, storm damage and shifting sandbanks.

By the 18th century, major engineering works were needed to protect the lighthouse base from tidal scour and saltwater infiltration. The lighthouse keepers' reports from the 19th century often note how dangerous and exposed the island had become. Cordouan is now a barely-emergent rocky islet, about 1.8 hectares in area, completely surrounded by water at high tide. Only a few rocks and the lighthouse's massive foundation remain visible during full tide.

We might ask how the Louis de Foix lighthouse operated as a financial venture? This is a most important point in view of changes that were to take place in the expansion of lighthouse building

that was to come. My chapter on pre-industrial lighthouses will be devoted to this topic and this site has particular relevance.

First of all, the French King was the patron but not the funder. The lighthouse was commissioned by Henri III in 1584 and completed under Henri IV in 1611. Louis de Foix, the architect and engineer, was granted the right to build and operate it.⁴⁵ The Crown did not fully finance the lighthouse. Instead, it authorized de Foix to raise funds and collect dues once the tower was operational. This is one of the earliest known occasions when charges were made for the use of lighthouses by mariners.⁴⁶

The monarchy gave political and legal endorsement but expected the project to be self-financing. Louis de Foix was a wealthy man, but he risked much of his own fortune in this venture. He raised funds from local merchants, ship owners, and investors in the Bordeaux region, who stood to benefit from safer trade routes. The project took nearly thirty years to complete. It faced weather disasters, and was ruinously expensive. De Foix died before it was finished and the state had to intervene to complete it. This was a high-risk, high-prestige private enterprise, indeed, one of the first, as we shall discover later. For de Foix, the enormous costs, delays, and storm damage meant the project barely broke even and he reportedly died in financial distress. However, merchants and regional governments considered it a success in reducing shipwrecks and boosting trade.

Light dues were fundamental from the very beginning, and were enforced by royal decree. Ships passing through the Gironde estuary were legally required to pay for the lighthouse upkeep of the lighthouse. Dues were collected at Bordeaux, Royan and other ports, based on ship tonnage and collection was performed by agents, a common practice at the time. Income was used to pay the keepers, purchase fuel (initially wood and later coal), and fund maintenance.

At first, hermits and clerics had maintained the ecclesiastical lights following the medieval model of charitable work. Then, as the lights became more technical and costly, local men were employed as lighthouse keepers. The funding of lighthouses through charity was no longer feasible.

The interior of Louis de Foix's lighthouse was highly unusual for a lighthouse. It wasn't just a beacon it was conceived as a monument to royal



ABOVE AND FACING PAGE: The Chapel inside the structure of Louis de Foix.

authority, Renaissance art, and divine guidance. It was designed as a multi-story Renaissance tower, blending functional maritime purpose with symbolic architecture. It consisted of a massive stone base and foundation platform with four primary interior levels, each with a distinct architectural and symbolic purpose. A central spiral staircase led all the way from the base to the lantern chamber.

At the lowest level was the entrance hall and storage area for fuel, tools and provisions and water. It was accessed by a stone doorway via external steps that were often submerged at high tide. Walls were thick and windows were small to protect against the ferocity of the sea. The most ornate room was dedicated to the Virgin Mary and St. Nicholas, the patron of sailors (see p100). Designed in classical Renaissance style it had vaulted ceiling columns and pilasters, stained glass and an altarpiece of marble or painted decoration. The chapel was used by the keepers, visiting clergy, and sometimes passing sailors for prayers and mass. This beautiful space still exists today restored and preserved. It has served as the living space for the resident keepers and occasional royal guests. There was a small fireplace, bunks or straw mattresses and storage niches, decorated modestly but with architectural care and a blend of utility and elegance.

The lighthouse lantern was originally designed to house an open flame using wood, pitch, or coal, located at the top of the tower and accessible by spiral staircase. In the early years, the flame was exposed in a metal basket or brazier, without glass; it had to be constantly tended and was often inefficient. By 1611, efforts were made to enclose the light with glass panes, though early lenses were still decades away.⁴⁷ A stone staircase linked all levels and had a broad enough tread to allow fuel and supplies to be carried up. Niches in the walls provided places to store tools, devotional objects, or lamps. Light wells or narrow windows were placed for ventilation and minimal daylight.

The interior was more than functional. It was a symbol of Henri IV's reign, combining art, architecture, religion, and royal power. Latin inscriptions, coats of arms, and royal emblems were integrated into the architecture. Some rooms were absorbed or altered by the later 18th-century renovations by Joseph Teulère for Cordouan 4. The lantern room was completely rebuilt and replaced with a more modern design in the late 1700s. A final accolade for this fabulous lighthouse is that it was the first to carry one of the beautiful new catadioptric lenses designed by Augustin Fresnel, an advance that will be discussed in detail in Volume 3.



ABOVE: A part of the internal spiral staircase. A particular feature of French lighthouses is the fine finishing of the interiors. The images BELOW offer further support.





ABOVE: The Sumiyoshi lighthouse at Osaka in Japan.

Religious Lighthouses In Asia

Probably because of the significant cultural and language difficulties, there have been no obvious studies of lights being shown for navigation in Asia. The three significant countries we should consider are Japan, China, Korea and Viet Nam. Once again, in medieval times, all use of lights in this way were strongly associated with religious significance.

Japan

It is tempting to write off Japan as having no impact on our study because of the enormous impact made by the Scottish engineer Richard Brunton when he built a network of European-style lighthouses around the coasts of Japan in the nineteenth century. However, there is indeed an ancient tradition of light beacons in Japan which used beacon structures to assist mariners, though they were often deeply intertwined with religious or symbolic purposes rather than being purely functional in the modern sense.

They were often tied to Shinto shrines or Buddhist temples, especially in sheltered bays and port towns, and were placed and maintained with

the intention of aiding navigation, ensuring safe passage, and invoking divine protection for sailors. They were often donated by merchants or seafarers as votive offerings. They were often maintained by monks, shrine caretakers, or local communities and were lit with oil lamps or fires and visible from the sea, though their reach was limited.

The Sumiyoshi Lantern located in Osaka, is a stone lighthouse traditionally believed to have originated in the 12th century (Heian period). It was associated with Sumiyoshi Taisha, a major Shinto shrine dedicated to the Sumiyoshi Sanjin, gods of the sea and sailing. While primarily a votive or sacred object, it also served a practical maritime function of marking the entrance to the port of Suminoenotsu and guiding ships safely.

In pre-modern Japan, lanterns or beacon fires were placed near shrines or temples near the coast. Just as we saw with the ancient Greeks, these served the dual purposes of offerings to the gods and navigation aids for mariners. The Sumiyoshi deities were considered protectors of travellers and sailors, so placing a lighthouse-like structure near their shrine made symbolic and practical sense.

During the Edo period (1603–1868), Japan saw the construction of more formalized ishidōrō (stone lanterns) and beacon towers along the coast. These structures often burned oil or used reflected light, and though less advanced than Western-style lighthouses, they did help coastal navigation. Thus, structures like the Sumiyoshi Lighthouse were used to assist mariners, though their origin and form were shaped by religious reverence, not purely technical engineering.

At Anorisaki near the entrance to Ise Bay is a site where temples maintained bonfires or lanterns for protection and maritime safety. Because of its importance, it was chosen in 1873 by Richard Brunton for one of the many lighthouses he built in Japan. At the Cape of Hinomisaki is a shrine dedicated to Amaterasu and Susanoo, gods of sun and sea and wind. Here too, early fires or stone lanterns were maintained to warn ships of rocks and aid coastal navigation. This eventually led to the modern Hinomisaki Lighthouse, Japan's tallest. There is a Japanese stone Lighthouse at Tomonoura built in 1859 that overlooks an old port town with long-standing maritime significance. It is considered a classic example of a Japanese “lighthouse” with religious and functional roles.



ABOVE: The Liuhe Pagoda in China is said to be a medieval lighthouse.

China

Other Asian countries also developed early maritime beacon systems that blended religious, ceremonial, and navigational functions, much like Japan. However, the form and intent varied based on culture, geography, and maritime priorities.

During the Han Dynasty (206 BCE to 220 CE) China's coastal and river navigation systems were quite advanced. Beacon towers called *fenghuotai* were primarily military but sometimes adapted near ports for maritime signal fires. Watchtowers along the Yangtze and Pearl Rivers were sometimes used to aid boatmen and merchants.

In China's Tang and Song Dynasties (7th–13th centuries), the Song dynasty (960–1279), had a vibrant maritime trade and used harbour lights and navigation markers. At Quanzhou, one of the world's busiest ports in the 11th–13th centuries, pagodas and lantern towers were constructed near the sea and river mouths to guide ships. Some were Buddhist structures, again showing the link of faith to navigation.

The Liuhe Pagoda (literally Six Harmonies Pagoda) is a multi-story Chinese pagoda in southern Hangzhou, Zhejiang province. It is located at the foot of Yuelun Hill, facing the Qiantang River. It was originally constructed in 970 by the Wuyue Kingdom, destroyed in 1121, and reconstructed fully by 1165, during the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279). It is said the pagoda also served as a lighthouse along the Qiantang River. Being of considerable size and stature, it actually served as a permanent lighthouse from nearly its beginning, to aid sailors in seeking anchorage for their ships at night.⁴⁸

During the Ming and Qing Dynasties harbour lights began appearing more frequently in major trading ports. Temples dedicated to Mazu, the sea goddess, often had towers or beacons nearby to protect and guide sailors. Mazu worship was central to sailor communities, especially in Fujian and Guangdong.

Korea

During the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1897) Korea used beacon mounds called *bongsudae* across the peninsula, mainly for military communication, but coastal ones assisted ships with signal fires. There were also warning systems for dangerous tides or pirate activity. As in Japan, Buddhist temples near the coast sometimes maintained ceremonial lights or stone lanterns, especially near ferry crossings and fishing harbours. These were usually of limited effect, but could help local navigation.

Vietnam

Vietnam's early maritime culture, especially during the Cham and Dai Viet periods, used temples near river mouths to guide boats. Some temples maintained lanterns or fires as offerings to deities such as Thủy thần (water gods) or Thiên Y A Na. As with China, Mazu worship was also introduced by Chinese merchants and may have included the use of beacons.

In summary, many Asian cultures used ancient lighthouse-like structures, often rooted in religion or symbolism, to assist mariners. China, in particular, had significant systems that predated Japan's, and temples throughout east and southeast Asia provided spiritual and literal guidance to sailors.

Conclusions

1. Whether by design or accident, there was an important contribution to the practice of using lights as navigational aids made by members of the Christian orders across Europe. Today, these lights are called Ecclesiastical Lights.

2. In strict historical terms, many of these lights are remembered more by culture and tradition than they are by document.

3. It is clear that deeply embedded religious practices have linked the use of fire at night to the sending of signals to those at sea, across the world, not just in Europe. These signals have proved universally useful to mariners.

4. The religious practice of keeping lights burning at altars may have contributed to the unintentional showing of lights that were taken up by mariners as useful to navigation because they were known to be reliable.

5. Even if shown deliberately, these lights may have been temporary or haphazard and had a measure of unreliability.

6. The visibility of these lights, particularly from high elevation from where they would have greatest effect, would have become known to mariners who added the locations to their sailing directions. Continued existence would have led to them being added to maps and sea charts.

7. Because of their strategic locations, many Ecclesiastical lights later became the sites of more permanent installations often built on top of existing ones, thus destroying much of the archaeological remains.

Notes

1 In the east, the centre of the Christian church was at Constantinople, previously Byzantium.

2 Wilken p7

3 Put simply, Henry famously needed a divorce but the Pope would not give him one so the King ordered the separation of the Catholic Church in England from the mother church in Rome. This resulted in a major attack on the religious orders in Britain and much destruction of their buildings.

4 Wilson, p5.

5 As with so many stories from these early times, there is some uncertainty and confusion in published material. First, Dubhán of Hook Head has sometimes been confused with Dubhán of Rosglas, a Christian bishop and contemporary of St Patrick who was also referred to as a Saint. The lighthouse on Hook Head is also promoted as the oldest working lighthouse in the world. It is certainly the oldest in Ireland and in northwest Europe. Readers should consider the history of other structures described in this book before jumping to conclusions. The structure we see today was probably in working order in 1240.

6 The Celts did write, but writing was not central to their culture. They relied heavily on oral transmission, and most written records of their traditions come from either Roman authors or Christian monks who wrote them down centuries later.

7 The Venerable Bede was an English monk, author and scholar. He was one of the greatest teachers and writers during the Early Middle Ages, and his most famous work, Ecclesiastical History of the English People, gained him the title "The Father of English History". Born on lands belonging to the twin monastery of Monkwearmouth–Jarrow in present-day Tyne and Wear, England, Bede was sent to Monkwearmouth at the age of seven and later joined Abbot Ceolfrith at Jarrow. Wikipedia, 2025.

8 Frisians were from today's Netherlands.

9 Pye, p65.

10 <https://www.britainexpress.com/History/medieval/religious-orders.htm> Downloaded 20190903

Benedictines - founded by St Benedict in 529 AD. The largest order, the Benedictines were noted for their learning. The four vows of these monks were to obedience, chastity, poverty, and manual labour for 7 hours each day. St Dunstan, Archbishop of Canterbury from 960 AD, was responsible for establishing a large number of Benedictine houses.

Carthusians - the Carthusians lived lives of isolation and silence, spending their days in their own individual cells. The monks wore hair shirts and saw each other only on Sundays and feast days, but even then conversation was rarely allowed. The main Carthusian monastery in Britain was at Charterhouse in London. After the Dissolution of the Monasteries this became Charterhouse School. The Carthusians were too strict an order to win wide appeal.

Cistercians - Begun in France under the influence of St.Bernard of Clairvaux, the order chose isolated rural locations to build their monasteries, particularly in Wales and in the north, where they reclaimed land laid waste by William the Conqueror. They were not so scholarly as the Benedictines, but focused on agriculture and hard manual labour. One unanticipated result of this work ethic was that several monasteries became very rich and owned large parcels of land.

Augustinians - founded in the 11th century, these "Black Canons" lived in communities but went out among the populace to preach. As a consequence of this, and their propensity for giving alms and hospitality, the Augustinians were quite popular, and their churches were thus large and ornate.

Cluniacs - The Cluniacs were one of several orders who tried to return the Benedictine rule to its original simplicity. They first came to England at Lewes in about 1078. The Cluniacs spent much of their time in devotion, and left the agricultural toil to paid servants. Most Cluniac establishments were small; the largest were at Much Wenlock, Castle Acre, and Thetford.

Trinitarians (also called Mathurins or "Red Friars") - originally founded in 1197 to rescue Christian captives, they also spent large amounts of their money on alms for the poor. Their major house was at Knaresborough (North Yorkshire).

Military Orders were also significant. Knights of the Temple (Templars) - founded in Jerusalem in 1118 for the expressed purpose of protecting (Christian) travellers to the Holy Land. The Templars became the "bankers of Christendom", and owned huge amounts of property throughout Europe. The order came to England under King Stephen, and the Temple Church in London is a good example of their habit of building round churches, or at least incorporating rounded shapes into their architecture. The order was officially disbanded in the early 14th century, though its legacy lives on in the many place names incorporating the word "temple".

Knights of St John of Jerusalem (Knights Hospitallars) - originally provided hospitality and medical care to pilgrims in the Holy Land. The Hospitallers came to England under Henry I. They founded houses where novices could be trained in military arts and receive

religious instruction. When the Templars were disbanded the Hospitallers received many of their churches and other property.

11 A mendicant was a member of a religious order that lived by begging (from the Latin mendicare, meaning "to beg") and relied entirely on charity for their sustenance. Mendicants renounced personal and communal property to devote themselves to preaching, missionary work, and serving the poor.

12 Clay, pp51-2.

13 Patent Rolls of the Reign of Henry III, 1232 to 1247, Reprinted by HMSO 1901, p392.

14 In Volume 1 (p258-9) I have previously speculated that the main entry port to Britain at the time was at Richborough on the Isle of Thanet in Kent, and not at Dover. This might explain why Canterbury was chosen for the first Christian settlement in England, rather than at Dover.

15 MacGibbon, D and Ross, T 1892 The Castellated and Domestic Architecture of Scotland. Volume 5. Edinburgh: David Douglas, McGibbon and Ross p193.

16 Portpatrick Old Church, Portpatrick, Dumfries and Galloway Building record. May 2015, John Pickin Archaeology and Heritage, High Weirston House, Leswalt, Stranraer , Dumfries and Galloway DG9 0RQ. <https://www.portpatrickchurchyard.org.uk/pdfs/PortpatrickOldChurchBuildingRecord.pdf>

17 Christianity was first accepted by the Romans in Britain during the 4th century, particularly after the Edict of Milan in 313 CE, when Emperor Constantine I legalized Christianity throughout the Roman Empire.

18 Wilken, p100-101.

19 Clay, Rotha Mary., The Hermits and Anchorites of England. Methuen & Co. London, 1914. <https://ia801302.us.archive.org/0/items/hermitsanchorite00clay/hermitsanchorite00clay.pdf>

20 Wilken, R L: Chapter 10 - Monasticism, p99-108.

21 Immrama, meaning 'voyages' or literally 'rowings about' refers to a category of medieval Irish Christian literature in which a protagonist sets about voyaging in penance for sins committed.

22 Naish, p21.

23 Naish, p82.

24 Naish, p97.

25 The Viking name for the point was vadra fiord (weather estuary) from which the name of Waterford derives.

26 <https://garda-post.com/history-of-hook-lighthouse/>

27 The terms priory, monastery, and abbey are often used interchangeably in everyday speech, but historically and technically they have distinct meanings and reflect a kind of hierarchy or administrative difference within the medieval Church, especially in the context of monastic orders like the Benedictines. A monastery is the general term for a community of monks (or nuns) living under religious vows, usually isolated from secular life, following a rule (like the Rule of St Benedict). Both abbeys and priories are types of monasteries. So “monastery” is the broadest term and just means “place where monastics live and pray.” An abbey is a monastery that is Autonomous and independent. It is headed by an abbot (male) or abbess (female). It is often more wealthy, powerful, or influential, and has jurisdiction over other monastic houses (including priories). Abbeys were often major landowners, patrons of the arts, and political players. For example, St Albans Abbey was one of the richest in England; Whitby Abbey was famous for the Synod of Whitby (664); Fountains Abbey was a great Cistercian house in Yorkshire. A priory is a monastery that is headed by a prior or prioress (instead of an abbot/abbess). It is often subordinate to an abbey (called a dependent or daughter house) but can also be independent, though generally with less prestige and autonomy. Some priories were “cells” of a mother abbey like Tynemouth Priory, which was a cell of St Albans Abbey after 1090. Thus Tynemouth Priory was dependent on St Albans. We might have an Order of “Seniority” (loosely speaking) thus: An Abbey with an Abbot/Abbess has Full autonomy and is independent; A Priory with a Prior/Prioress has some autonomy but is dependent; A Priory or Cell has a Prior/Prioress Under an Abbey’s authority. A monastery is a general term for any of the above. Tynemouth was once an independent monastery, but after the Norman Conquest it became a priory under St Albans Abbey. That meant the Abbot of St Albans had authority over it, even though it was large and important in its own right.

28 Tynemouth priory, 1867 proof engraving by William Miller after J M W Turner. The lighthouse, since demolished, stands on the far right of the promontory.

29 Moir (1958), p1.

30 <https://explorewestnorfolk.co.uk/venues/ruins-of-st-edmunds-chapel-hunstanton-77/>

31 Long, p113

32 Stevenson p22 reports that a reliable British traveller called Leland described the lighthouse in 1540 and a document in Catholic church records shows money allocated for maintenance to the roof.

33 Obviously, there are slightly different spellings of the names Nicholas and Michael depending upon the

language being used.

34 A very similar site exists in northern France called Mont Saint Michel.

35 Trethewey, Ancient Lighthouses, chapter 3.

36 The reference is to Plymouth Municipal Records of 1488, given in Hague and Christie’s book p18. No other records have so far been found.

37 Hague and Christie, p152.

38 Also, the image on p106: Eine Abtei am Ende der Welt. <https://www.patrimoine-iroise.fr/culturel/religieux/Saint-Mathieu.php>

39 Wikipédia: Abbaye Saint-Mathieu de Fine-Terre.

40 Geographical Magazine: Lighthouses: the solitary guards of the sea. <https://geographical.co.uk/culture/lighthouses-solitary-guards-of-the-sea>.

41 Wikipedia: Hiddensee.

42 <https://cordouan.culture.gouv.fr/en/religious-site>

43 The inter-marriages of royal personages during these centuries caused large areas of land to come to the groom as possessions of his wife - the dowry. In 1152, Eleanor of Aquitaine, one of the wealthiest and most powerful women in medieval Europe, married Henry Plantagenet (who became King Henry II of England in 1154). As Duchess of Aquitaine, Eleanor brought her vast French lands—including Aquitaine, Gascony, and others—into the English crown’s control through marriage. This created the so-called Angevin Empire, where the English king ruled over huge swaths of France—even more land than the French king! These constant changes in land ownership were part of the troubles that caused the Hundred Years War.

44 There are clear parallels here with the coast of England where sea levels are known to have risen substantially in the Isles of Scilly and on the Goodwins Sands since Roman times.

45 We shall examine in detail these private lighthouses in a later chapter.

46 In Ancient and Medieval times, lighthouses were state-funded or monastic; there were no dues. Then in the late 1500s, light dues were authorized at Cordouan. In the 1600s–1700s, Dutch and English authorities began charging structured dues. Finally in the 18th–19th c. the charging of light dues became the standard funding model across maritime Europe.

47 These problems are discussed further on p224.

48 According to the British historian Joseph Needham, Wikipedia Liuhe Pagoda, 20250610]