Medieval Lighthouses
Part 8 - Guilds, Brotherhoods & Fraternities

by Dr Ken Trethewey

Extracted from Medieval Lighthouses (2026) ISBN 978-1-9993273-3-0 https://www.medievallighthouses.info

Above: The Trinity House of Newcastle upon Tyne is a very old institution formed in 1505 from the Fellowship of Masters and Mariners of Ships of the Town of Newcastle upon Tyne.

Previous chapters have outlined the epochal changes brought about by the end of direct Imperial rule from Rome and many centuries were to pass before civilization was able to reach a comparable level of development, especially in the world of maritime safety. In the absence of leadership from government, citizens set about the formation of self-help groups and co-operatives. In parallel, a new paradigm of charitable giving and philanthropy came into existence which remains strongly present in British culture, a complete discussion of which is outside the scope of this work. In this chapter we shall see how some of these societies came into existence and how they continue to function today.

Objectives

The objectives of this chapter are:

1. To review the origins of Guilds, Brotherhoods and Fraternities.

2. To describe the methods by which civic co-operatives contributed to maritime safety.

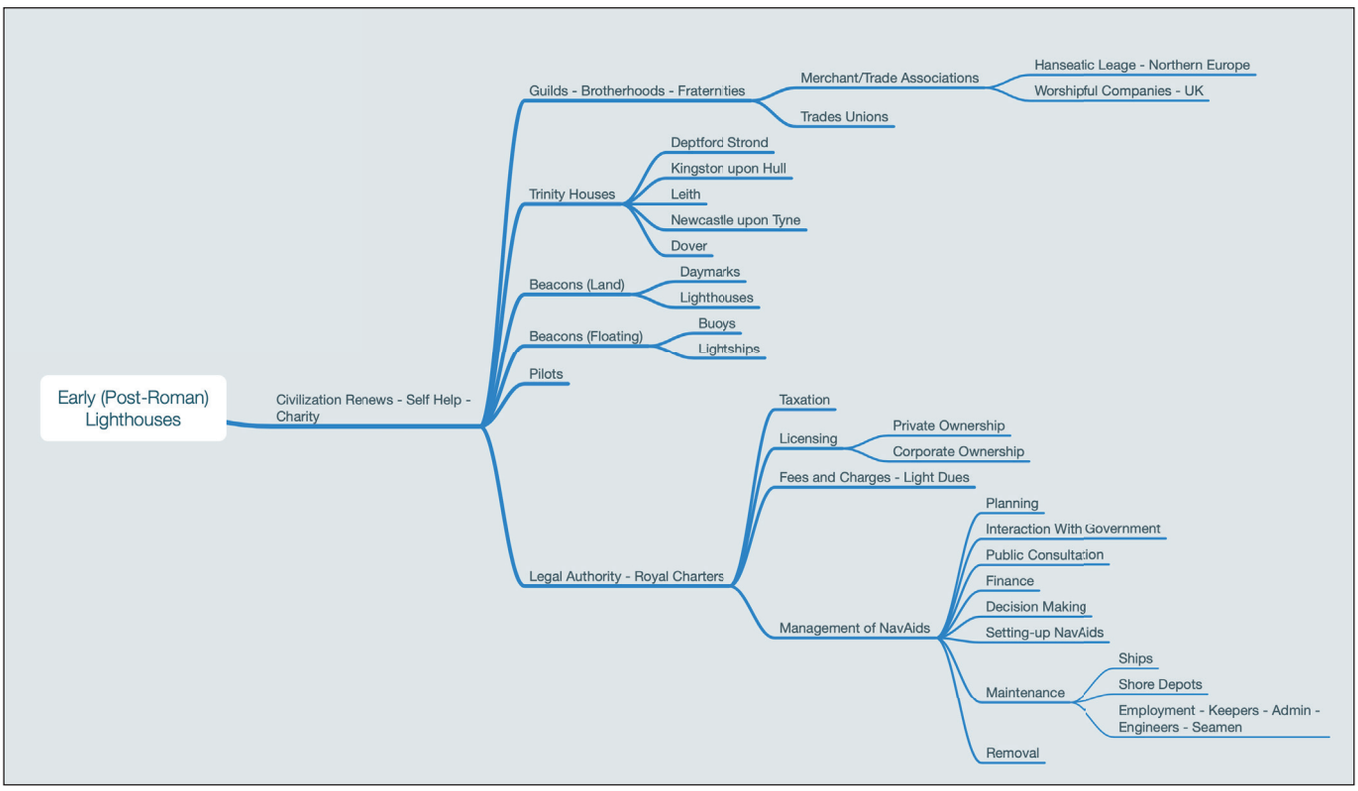
3. To identify the early forms of aids to navigation and their locations that were created by these societies.

The Christian Tradition

The dangers faced by seamen throughout history have led to a special kindred spirit of compassion and charity. From earliest times, they formed into groups and associations to look after the interests of their brothers of the sea and of their families. No matter how small or large, guilds, brotherhoods and fraternities arose and developed into recognizable associations. It was a luxury of the English language that there were several names to describe these very similar co-operative bodies.

They often had religious affiliations and, like modern trades unions, were designed for the mutual benefit of their members. Charity was almost always an objective. Help was given to the poor, the aged or the sick, and to their dependents, sometimes as money or pensions, but also in the provision of homes known as almshouses or colleges. And in a society where there was no Welfare State, help for the bereaved was literally a matter of life or death.

Obviously, some were more successful than others, typically dependent upon the power and influence of those controlling the land of the ports. Of this, more will be said below. Where these associations came to the notice of the monarch it was generally a recognition of their money-raising capacities that resulted in the award of Royal



Above: A topic taxonomy of societal events related to safety at sea that led up to the construction of early lighthouses and other navigational aids during the period 400-1700 CE. The decline and evolution of the Roman Empire after 400 CE led to a gradual reformation of social structures - generally within the context of Christianity - that concentrated upon the principles of self-help and charity.

Charters that gave them enhanced status and legal authority.

As we try to trace the roots of these societies, it is inevitable in British history to start with the invasion of the Normans in 1066 that has always been regarded as a major milestone in British history. However, its effect on the role of the Roman Catholic Church was comparatively small and we should look even earlier for the seeds of maritime guilds, brotherhoods and fraternities. Perhaps the biggest change from 1066 was in the priesthood where Anglo-Saxon incumbents were largely replaced by Normans. With the changes in Church leadership it became possible to bring England into line with practices already adopted by continental institutions. But both Saxons and Normans had the same purpose - the enhancement of trade and a desire to protect the interests that were beneficial to those objectives.

It is worthwhile at this point to provide a brief outline of the structures in place during the medieval period for the Church played a big role in society. Firstly, the Church was the biggest single landowner and had a very great influence over land use. Second, the 'professional' members of the Church were both literate and experienced in the ways of government. It was not surprising therefore that they also played a strong supporting role as royal civil servants.

Whittock points out that in 1388 the King's administrators were dominated by Church employees; however, by 1461, the balance had swung in favour of people from the laity.[1] So, in the earliest times, the links to the Christian religion and its doctrines were of a fundamental nature.

We have previously considered the class of navigational aid set up by members of the Church that were generally called *Ecclesiastical*. However, where the setting up and management of local aids to navigation came about in the major waterways and harbours of Britain due to the actions of local lay co-operatives, we usually refer to the organizations who set them up as guilds, brotherhoods and fraternities. From these, emerged a number of Trinity Houses, and from these came the model of lighthouse management in use in England, Wales and the Channel Islands today, the Corporation of Trinity House based in London.[2]

The History of Guilds

I have implied little difference between the three terms of interest here, but there are some subtle differences. The word "guild" originates from the Old English word for "geld" or "gild" meant "payment" or "contribution". This in turn comes from the Proto-Germanic word geldan, meaning "to pay." A further link can be made to the word "gold" and the name of the old unit of Dutch currency called the "guilder".

When comparing a brotherhood and a fraternity we find closer commonality for they are all but synonymous - the fraternity is derived from the Latin word *frater* (brother). The result is that we could say that a fraternity (brotherhood) is not a guild if it does not involve payment. Some might argue that this is a case of pedantry, as perhaps later examples will show, especially in times when social structures were embryonic.

In early medieval society, guilds began as associations of people who *paid dues* into a common fund to support mutual goals, such as protection, trade regulation, or religious observance. These payments supported things like funerals, religious services, and charitable aid. Over time, the word evolved to describe the associations themselves, particularly those of craftsmen, merchants, or professionals united for economic, political, or social purposes.

The tradition of guilds is long and widespread. In the Roman Empire, professional and religious associations called *collegia* served as early models for guilds. Among early Germanic peoples, mutual aid societies existed where members paid into communal funds. In the 9th–11th centuries early medieval guilds were Christian fraternities. Religious brotherhoods (often of lay people) formed around churches or monasteries that supported burials and spiritual welfare. These then laid the groundwork for future craft and trade guilds. In Anglo Saxon England, "frith-gilds" (peace guilds) offered mutual legal and financial protection for members. The growth of towns encouraged the formation of merchant guilds to regulate trade, secure privileges, and protect local economies. Artisans in towns formed craft guilds for blacksmiths, weavers, masons and the like to control standards, train apprentices, and regulate competition.

Sometimes, the importance of these guilds resulted in acquisition of power, as in the maritime republics of Genoa, Venice, Lübeck and other trading cities where highly organized merchant guilds possessed political power. They were in the heart of civic governance, often holding city council positions and Guild Halls were built as visible centres of power. In the 14th–15th centuries the power of the guild was at its height in administration of training and quality control of masters, apprentices and journeymen. They also took charge of prices and production quotas.

In the 16th century, the upheavals caused by the rise of Protestantism initiated a decline in the face of significant challenges. The rise of individualism undercut guilds' religious and communal foundations. Nation-states began to emerge that favoured centralized economies over local guild regulation. Printing, science, and capitalism introduced new trades and methods outside the guild structure. So, by the 17th–18th century guilds were fully in decline as enlightenment thinkers criticized them as restrictive and monopolistic. During the French Revolution guilds were abolished in 1791 under the Le Chapelier Law.

By the 19th–20th centuries functions of the guilds that remained were absorbed by trade unions and professional associations. In Germany, the Zunft system evolved into chambers of commerce and craft. Neo-guilds or livery companies (like in London) still survive as ceremonial or charitable organizations.

The Trinity Houses

From the many instances of co-operative groups that might be described as guilds, brotherhoods and fraternities eventually there arose in Britain a number of organizations that were each called *Trinity House*. In England there were Trinity Houses at Deptford Strond, Newcastle upon Tyne[3], Kingston upon Hull and Dover.[4] In Scotland there were similarly named bodies at Leith and Dundee.[5]

Exactly why the link to the Trinity was common is uncertain. Perhaps the naming of one led to copying by others. Searches for other institutions having the same name can be misleading because the Holy Trinity was one of the most significant elements of the Christian faith and was used elsewhere in instances that were unrelated to mariners and navigation. Mead[6] discusses the matter in some detail, but admits to reaching no definitive conclusion. Certainly it was Henry VIII who formally

Above: The headquarters of the Corporation of the Trinity House of Deptford Strond is in the building shown here, located at Tower Hill in London.

awarded each body at Deptford, Newcastle and Hull the name of Trinity House, but we see here that the name was already in use before then. Samuel Pepys had concluded in 1682 that the Trinity House at Hull, formed in 1354, appeared to be the first with that name, a fact that remains unchallenged, except that we here must recognize the pre-existence of guilds, brotherhoods and fraternities under different names now lost in time. Thus it is clear that similar societies in other locations were also in existence, but did not have the good fortune to attract the attention of the monarch. For example, there is no doubt of the existence of co-operative organizations in Dover and Dundee to which there have been references as being a Trinity House, but their denomination as organizations comparable with those in existence today has generally been disputed. According to Mead, The institution at Dover, however it was configured, was not a corporation but a court of loadsmanage that had been given a commission by the Lord Warden of the sink ports. Loadsmanage was another name for what we know today as pilotage. Pilots were essential in the Kent region, which included Dover, Deal and the Isle of Thanet, as well as for navigation in the rivers Thames and Medway. Thus, it cannot be denied that a so-called Trinity House of Dover existed at one time, and whether it should formally be referred to as a Trinity House or simply a Society of Mariners is somewhat irrelevant in this context. We can be confident in any case that the institution played no role in the creation or maintenance of navigational aids.[7]

Likewise, at Dundee, relevant documents are extremely rare and it is likely that, again, it was simply a Society of Mariners that probably played some co-operative or charitable role in the local vicinity and may also have lobbied those in authority for improvements to navigational aids, but were not themselves responsible for the erection or installation of navigational aids.

Of the others, i.e. at Deptford Strond,[8] Newcastle upon Tyne,[9] Kingston upon Hull[10] and Leith,[11] there is no doubt and they will be discussed in detail shortly.

In the Passing Tolls Act of 1861, the following co-operatives were named: The Trinity House of Kingston upon Hull, The Trinity House of Newcastle

upon Tyne, The Fraternity of Hostmen of Newcastle upon Tyne, The Society of Keelmen of Newcastle upon Tyne, The Trinity Corporation of Leith, The Guildry Incorporation of Perth, The Fraternity of the Masters and Seamen of Dundee.

Missing from the list was the Corporation of Trinity House of Deptford Strond, the reason for which will become apparent below. We cannot exclude the possibility of other associations, but the list in the Act was of those charging tolls from shipping at the time. The 1861 Act was intended to bring uniformity to the management of navigational aids around the coast of Britain and the taxation to pay for it, a tax known as **Light Dues**.

So it is clear that guilds, brotherhoods and fraternities for mariners were probably in existence in Anglo-Saxon times in one form or another, but the extent of their effectiveness depended upon the power of the local landowners and their scope to co-operate with the activities of seamen.

In any co-operative activity, something is given in return for something else, and in this case it is clear that, leaving aside the charitable works, an improvement to the safety of seamen (as well as a reduction in losses to merchants suffering from problems at sea) was offered in return for the payment of local taxes.

The safety measures involved the provision of:

Pilots to ensure safe passage in and out of harbour;

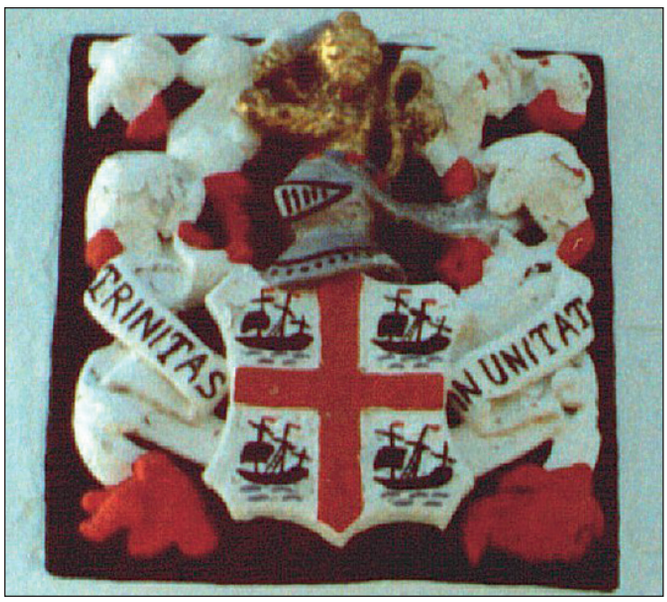
Buoys and beacons to mark hazards and show alignments in channels;

Lights for similar purposes.

Sometimes, moorings and port facilities were also included.

The taxes or dues were generally based upon the size of the ship and/or the amount of cargo being carried.

There were, of course, always arguments over the size of the monies involved, but the benefits to shipping were so obvious that no-one could seriously object to the principles by which the taxes were applied. The value of these taxes grew enormously in parallel with the great growth in volume of trade over the centuries, and profits were usually used for the charitable objectives already described. However, it will become clear in later discussions just how much of a commercial goldmine had been discovered, and the subject soon attracted the attention of cash-strapped monarchs looking to grow their treasuries. Those associations that were most successful were incorporated through Royal Charters into new bodies called Trinity House with extended powers and privileges, and by the mid-19th century, one in particular at Deptford in London was destined to become predominant as the single authority responsible for English and Welsh Aids to Navigation, of which the provision and management of lighthouses was becoming an increasing part.



Above: The coat-of-arms of the Trinity House of Deptford Strond as it often appears affixed to a wall at a lighthouse.

21st Century Lighthouse Authorities

In case readers are puzzled by the complexity of these management arrangements, I wish to add a paragraph here that I hope will help.

After much reorganization by government, the British Isles finally adopted three General Lighthouse Authorities (GLAs) - Trinity House (London) for all lighthouses[12] in England, Wales, the Channel Islands, Gibraltar and the Falkland Islands[13]; The Northern Lighthouse Board[14] (NLB) for all lighthouses in Scotland and the Isle of Man, managed from Edinburgh; the Commissioners for Irish Lights[15] (CIL) for all lighthouses in Ireland, and managed from Dublin. All of the world's GLAs co-operate through the International Association of Lighthouse Authorities (IALA).

Above: The coat-of-arms of the Trinity House of Deptford Strond, an embossed crest on a publication.[24]

The Trinity House Of Deptford Strond

The name Deptford relates to the presence of a "deep ford" across a river called Ravensbourne that flowed into the Thames.[16] This place was known as Deptford Creek until its junction with the Thames. It was here that a group of seamen had traditionally formed their own guild called Trinity House and on Trinity Monday each year elected a Master. One of the first masters was Sir William Penn, father of the founder of Pennsylvania. He was elected Master on third June 1667.[17]

Deptford had long been a small village favoured by mariners and seamen as a landing point along the Thames for vessels plying between the upper reaches of the Thames and the North Sea and English Channel. Three words were used as synonyms to represent the original group: guild, brotherhood and fraternity.

A guild would have begun as an organization of persons with related interests and goals, especially one formed for the mutual aid or protection of its members in times of danger or financial trouble. As time went by, such groups evolved into associations, as of merchants or artisans, organized to maintain standards and to protect the interests of its members, and that sometimes constituted a local governing body.

As we have seen, the word *gild* is associated with the Anglo-Saxon word *geld* - a payment. However, there is an alternative prehistoric sense of "sacrifice," as if in worship, in which the word has the meaning of a combination for religious purposes, either Christian or pagan. The Anglo-Saxon guilds had a strong religious component; they were burial societies that paid for Masses for the souls of deceased members as well as paying fines in cases of justified crime. Continental guilds of merchants, incorporated in each town or city and holding exclusive rights of doing business there, arrived after the Norman Conquest. In many cases they became the governing body of a town (compare Guildhall, which came to be the London city hall). Trade guilds arose around the 14th. c., as craftsmen united to protect their common interest – a trade union in a more modern sense.[18]

Grosvenor writes that there is evidence that a Trinity Guild was formed during the time of Alfred the Great, but there is rather more evidence that the origins of Trinity House lie in the 13th century when Stephen Langton, who was Archbishop of Canterbury from 1207 to 1228, founded...

> *"a band of Godly disposed men who for the actual supression of evil disposed persons bringing ships to destruction by the showing forth of false beacons do bind themselves together in the love of Lord Christ in the name of the Masters and Fellows of Trinity Guild, to succour from the dangers of the sea all who are beset upon the cost of England to feed them when they are hungered and athirst, to bind up their wounds and to build and light proper beacons for the guidance of mariners".*
> [19] [20]

The Trinity Guild was almost certainly not the first of its kind, and because of the mobility of its members, word of such a beneficial organisation would have spread widely and quickly around the country once the first group had been formed. Besides the group at Deptford, similar Guilds were certainly found in Dundee, Edinburgh, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Kingston upon Hull and Dover. We know for certain that a Trinity Guild was formed in Hull in 1369, so it is likely that others were formed or already in existence at approximately the same time.

In each Guild, members were known as Brethren because of their membership of a brotherhood,

Above: An engraving of Trinity House used as the frontispiece of the book by Barrett.

Above: Trinity Almshouses in Whitechapel Road, London centred on a chapel.

and the titles of Elder Brother and Younger Brother of Trinity House are used to this day.

Deptford had selected St. Nicholas as its Christian patron, for whom a church was built at least as early as the 12th century. St. Nicholas is the patron saint (see p100) of sailors, fishermen and merchants, amongst others, so the affiliation confirms Deptford as a suitable place for a focus on mariners' welfare. Indeed, Grosvenor reports that the church tower exhibited a navigational light at night.[21]

In 1512, the growing reputation of Deptford as a focus of maritime activities had led the Trinity Guild to apply to Henry VIII for incorporation and may have focused his mind on the site he had in mind for a new naval dockyard, and so Henry incorporated the group the following year. Thus, the Corporation of the Trinity House of Deptford Strond was created.[22]

In the first instance, Guilds were very much about welfare. Associated with the Church, their Christian outlook led them to actively set up places of support, sanctuary and refuge for mariners and their families, often in the form of almshouses that were centred around church buildings. Help for children would have been available in the form of schools and guardianship.

> *"[Trinity House]…was to be administered by a master, four wardens, and eight assistants to be elected every year. It is purposes were to consider all and singular articles anywise concerning the science or art of mariners; with power and authority for ever of granting and making laws, ordinances, and statutes amongst themselves, for the relief, increase, and augmentation of the shipping of this are realm of England. All which laws, ordinances, and statutes, those of offending to punish and chastise at their discretion is, according to the quantity of the offence; to hold lands for religious and charitable uses; and to have and enjoy all and singular the liberties, franchises, and privileges which their predecessors the shipmen or mariners of this are around of England ever had, used or enjoyed."* [23]

Sir Thomas Spert played a significant role. He was an Admiral of the King's Navy and had much influence at Court. Henry, who was moved to increase the strength of his Navy, may have been influenced to decide upon Deptford for his new dockyard, thanks to Spert, who was given command of Henry's flagship the *Henri Grace à Dieu*.

THE ROYAL

CHARTER

OF

CONFIRMATION

GRANTED BY

His most excellent MAJESTY

King JAMES II.

TO THE

TRINITY-HOUSE

OF

Deptford-Strond;

For the Government and Increase of the

NAVIGATION OF ENGLAND,

And the Relief of Poor

Mariners, their Widows, and Orphans, &c.

LONDON: Printed in the Year 1763.

(1)

THE ROYAL

CHARTER

OF

CONFIRMATION

Granted by His most Excellent Majesty

King JAMES II.

TO THE

TRINITY-HOUSE

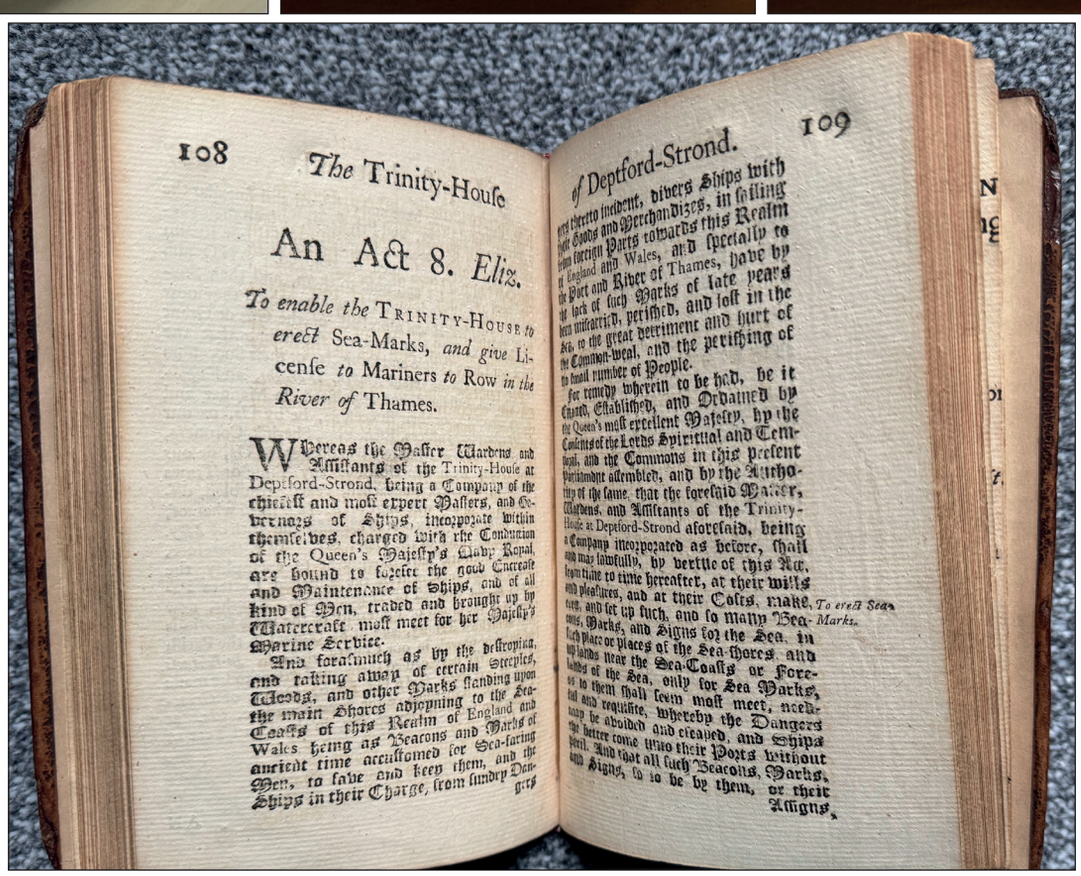
OF

Deptford-Strond.

JAMES the Second, By the Grace of God, of *England*, *Scotland*, *France*, and *Ireland*, *King*, Defender of the Faith, &c. To all to whom these Presents shall come, Greeting. Whereas our well-beloved Lieges and Subjects, *Shipmen* and *Mariners* of this our Realm of *England*, consisting of *Master*, *Wardens*, and *Assistants* of the Guild or Fraternity of the most glorious and undividible *Trinity*, and of St. *Clement* in the Parish Church of *Deptford Strond* in our County of *Kent*, are, and have been of long time,

Foundat this Cha

A 2 a



108 The Trinity-House

An Act 8. *Eliz.*

To enable the TRINITY-HOUSE *to erect* Sea-Marks, *and give* Licenſe *to* Mariners *to* Row *in the River of* Thames.

WHereas the Maſter Wardens and Aſſiſtants of the Trinity-Houſe at Deptford-Strond, being a Company of the chiefeſt and moſt expert Maſters, and Governors of Ships, incorporate within themſelves, charged with the Conduction of the Queen's Majeſty's Lady Royal, are bound to forſee the good Increaſe and Maintenance of Ships, and of all kind of Men, traded and brought up by Watercraft moſt meet for her Majeſty's Marine Service.

And foraſmuch as by the deſtroying, and taking away of certain Steeples, Woods, and other Marks ſtanding upon the main Shores adjoyning to the Sea-Coaſts of this Realm of England and Wales being as Beacons and Marks of ancient time accuſtomed for Sea-faring Men, to ſave and keep them, and the Ships in their Charge, from ſundry Dan-

109 of Deptford-Strond.

gers thereto incident, divers Ships with their Goods and Merchandizes, in ſailing from foreign Parts towards this Realm of England and Wales, and ſpecially to the Port and River of Thames, have by the lack of ſuch Marks of late years been miſcarried, periſhed, and loſt in the Sea, to the great detriment and hurt of the Common-weal, and the periſhing of no ſmall number of People.

For remedy wherein to be had, be it Enacted, Eſtabliſhed, and Ordained by the Queen's moſt excellent Majeſty, by the Conſents of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and the Commons in this preſent Parliament aſſembled, and by the Authority of the ſame, that the foreſaid Maſter, Wardens, and Aſſiſtants of the Trinity-Houſe at Deptford-Strond aforeſaid, being a Company incorporated as before, ſhall and may lawfully, by vertue of this Act, from time to time hereafter, at their wills and pleaſures, and at their Coſts, make, erect, and ſet up ſuch, and ſo many Sea-Marks, Marks, and Signs for the Sea, in ſuch Place or places of the Sea-ſhores, and up lands near the Sea-Coaſts or Foreſands of the Sea, only for Sea Marks, as to them ſhall ſeem moſt meet, needful and requiſite, whereby the Dangers may be avoided and eſchewed, and Ships the better come into their Ports without peril. And that all ſuch Beacons, Marks, and Signs, to be by them, or their Aſſigns,

To erect Sea-Marks.

ABOVE: A book printed for the Trinity House of Deptford Strond in 1763 to publish the renewal of its authority under King James II. The Trinity House had been first set up under Henry VIII in 1514 and renewed under Elizabeth I in 1566, the eighth year of her reign. The Act was reproduced in later pages of the same book, as shown at the bottom. Selections are given here in the text on p140.

Elizabeth's Act of 1566

Whilst Henry's Charter was the instrument of incorporation for the London Trinity House, it did not specify the actual functions the company should execute, being a more general document to associate the Brethren with "all and singular articles anywise concerning the science or art of mariners." [25] We might be forgiven, in the benefit of hindsight, for thinking that suddenly the Trinity House would commence a programme of lighthouse building. We shall see in a later chapter that it was not until 1609 that the Corporation built its first lighthouse at Lowestoft. Trinity House finally achieved a monopoly over lighthouse building and maintenance in Britain only as the result of the Lighthouse Act of 1836 which gave Trinity House the power to buy out private lighthouses and take full control over their operation. It was as if the building of lighthouses was the final stage in the strategy of improving marine efficiency and safety; amongst other objectives, the earlier stages concerned the management of pilots[26] and had been much easier to implement. Henry's Act did, however, give Trinity House significant power of control over maritime affairs, with the authority to bring miscreants before the courts.

Fifty years later, it was the successor to Henry VIII, his daughter Elizabeth, who was made aware of a degradation of seamarks that was imperiling sailors. In 1566 she followed up the 1514 Act with one of her own in the eighth year of her reign (1565-6). Sharp-eyed readers can see this for themselves on p139. This time, the Act giving powers to Trinity House was rather more specific.

"And forasmuch as by the destroying, and taking away of certain Steeples, Woods, and other Marks standing upon the main shores adjoining to the Sea-Coasts of this Realm of England and Wales being as Beacons and Marks of ancient time accustomed for Sea-faring Men, to have and keep them, and the ships in their Charge, from sundry Dangers thereto incident, diverse Ships with their Goods and Merchandises, in sailing from foreign Parts towards this Realm of England and Wales, and specially to the Port and River of Thames, have by the lack of such Marks of late years been miscarried, perished, and lost in the Sea, to the great detriment and hurt of the Common-weal, and the perishing of no small number of People."

The remedy was to make it clear that Trinity House had her full authority to manage all seamarks.

" ... by vertue of this Act, from time to time hereafter, at their wills and pleasures, and at their costs, make, erect, and set up such, and so many Beacons, Marks, and Signs for the sea, in such place or places of the Sea-shores and up lands near the Sea-Coasts or Forelands of the Sea, only for Sea Marks, as to them shall seem most meet, needful and requisite, whereby the Dangers may be avoided and escaped, and Ships the better come unto their Ports without peril. And that all such Beacons, Marks, and Signs, so to be by them, or their Assigns, erected, made, and set up at the Costs and Charges of the said Master, Wardens, and Assistants, shall and may be continued, renewed, and maintained, from Time to Time, at the Costs and Charges of the said Master, Wardens, and Assistants; any thing to the contrary hereof notwithstanding."

The second part of the Act (not reproduced here) ensured that the Trinity House was empowered to take action against anyone interfering with these seamarks, and that included the chopping down of a tree that could indicate a mariner's position!

Vital clues about medieval lights can be found in unusual places. For example, Elizabeth awarded a charter to the town of Boston in 1572 in which the Queen mentions two beacons that have fallen into disrepair. We know that Boston was an important port for Hanseatic League trading so it is likely that beacons were in use to assist the trading ships into harbour.

The First Use Of The Word Lighthouse

Of crucial importance, however, is to notice that Elizabeth's Act made no mention of a lighthouse. It is important to realise here that there was no word 'lighthouse' in the English language at this point. The word 'beacon' was almost always used to mean a fire, for at this point in history the only practical way to make light with more power than candles was to make fire. So Elizabeth's text includes the phrase 'Beacons and Marks.' Marks - or more specifically, seamarks - were visible features on the coast that could help a navigator in daylight. Clearly, it was necessary to light a beacon at night.

Of course, we should be aware that in ancient times the word 'pharos' became synonymous with what we call a lighthouse today. A complete explanation of the etymology has been given in Volume 1. Suffice to say that the noun became used more in poetic, scholarly, or antiquarian contexts than in everyday speech. As the idea of a building that would 'house' a 'light' became more widely accepted, it was obvious to adopt the joined-up version of light-house in the first instance. This continued for a long time before the hyphen was eventually omitted as a matter of course.

The earliest known use of the noun lighthouse[27] is in the early 1600s.[28] In Elizabeth's time, it was always the use of the word beacon that was associated with a signal fire, coal brazier, or open flame placed on a prominent headland, tower, or raised structure to warn ships of danger, like reefs or rocks, or to guide them safely to shore—especially at night. In many cases, beacons were not enclosed or housed like later lighthouses; they were simply fires maintained on platforms. The introduction of the word lighthouse into the English language coincided with the ignition of a new programme of building lighted aids to navigation. It is no coincidence that the word 'lighthouse' entered the vocabulary at the same time.[29]

It was 43 years between Trinity House being given the authority to erect beacons and actually building a lighthouse at Dungeness in 1609. It was as if they had been shamed into it by a growing number of privately built and managed structures, and it must surely have been this burst of activity that caused the birth of the word lighthouse. But once a gap in the market has been identified, it is usual for a flurry of activity to emerge as people seek to capitalize on it. The same might be said of the recognition of the value of lighthouses to businessmen. However, it was not that easy. There are some who ignored the rules, but the standard method was to approach the monarch for permission. It was necessary to present a case, ideally supported by as many members of the local community as possible. Sometimes a *quid pro quo* was required along the lines of, "If you let me build it, I'll give you ..." OK, let's just call it bribery. But that's how it was done. We will come across this kind of skulduggery in our study of East Anglia by those who should have been trustworthy.

Depending upon the King's mood would determine whether he simply agreed the petition or passed it to Trinity House for their opinion; after all, they were the 'experts' and had the full authority of Elizabeth 8. So the early days of Trinity House involved assessing the need for the proposed lighthouse and advising the King accordingly.

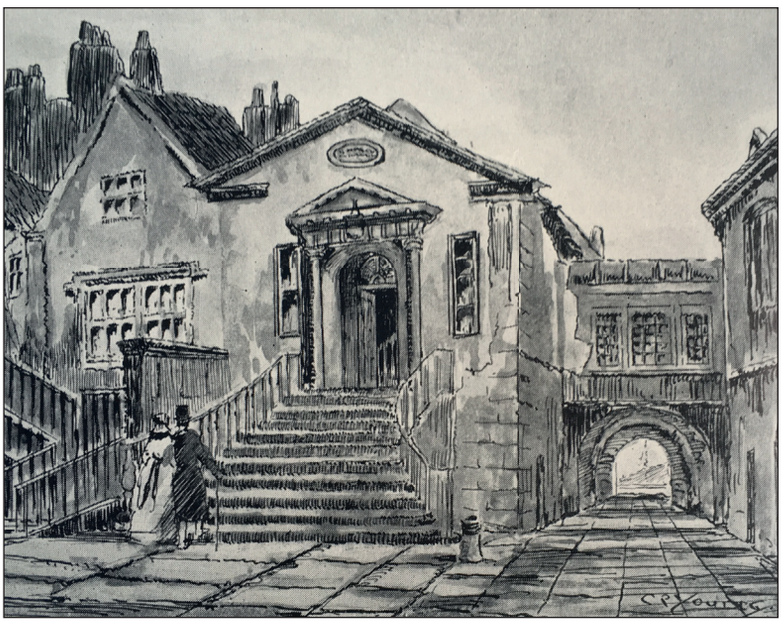
We are fortunate in having some preserved records of these early activities which tend to show that Trinity House declined to support far more proposals than they agreed to. Documents prove the poor judgement of some of their conclusions. In denying the value of lights to prevent wrecks on the Goodwin Sands, they wrote to the King:

> *"Trinity House have never known any ship to be lost for want of lights. Ships are cast away there when driven from their anchors by storms which lights could not prevent."*[30]

They refused to countenance a light at the Lizard in Cornwall:

> *"Ships never seek the channel from the ocean at night. Besides, seamen seldom make their landfall at the Lizard but commonly at Plymouth or Dartmouth. The Lizard is very seldom seen outward or homeward bound, and the channel is there so broad that men may sail by course at night or day without fear."*[31]

And many of their objections focused on the taxation that would be placed upon the ship owners. Presented with the possibility of navigational aids for the Goodwin Sands, there was very little support for Sir John Meldrum, but after he had placed a bond for £1,000 with the townsfolk so that there would be no charges to them, he gathered all the support he needed. *Plus ça change!*



ABOVE LEFT: The courtyard and entrance of the Trinity House of Newcastle upon as depicted by Young. [32] *The scene is largely unchanged today (see p132).*
ABOVE RIGHT: Commemorative plaque on the outside wall of the Trinity House stating the date of acquisition of the site as "1505 by the Fellowship of Masters and Mariners of Ships of the Town of Newcastle upon Tyne".

The Trinity House Of Newcastle Upon Tyne

As in the case of the other mariners' guilds, there is a very long heritage of organised assistance to distressed and aged seamen. With time, the efficient functioning of travel and trade on the River Tyne became of parallel importance. The Trinity House of Newcastle upon Tyne was formally established in the city in the 16th century.[33] However, it appears that a co-operative had first formed further north in Berwick sometime in the period 1283 to 1310, for there is a record by British historian Leland of:

> *"... a howse at Barwike, Ordinis S. Trinitates; but Anthony Beke, Byshope of Duresme, destroyd it..."* [34]

Beke was Bishop of Durham from 1283-1310, and his orders caused the guild to be moved to Newcastle.

Coal had been known about in the northeast of England for centuries. Washed up on the shore at first, the black rocks were soon found to be a valuable fuel and called *sea coal.* There is evidence that the Romans used coal, but it was not until the 13th century when its exploitation finally took on a measure of significance. Coal is mentioned in the records of County Durham as early as the 12th century, when the Boldon Book (1183) mentions a coal miner at Escomb. It states that the coal miner provided coal for the iron-work of the ploughs at nearby Coundon. The book also records that the smiths of Sedgefield and Bishopwearmouth were making use of local coal.[35] As the major landowner, the Bishop of Durham was naturally interested in new income streams and in the 1300s mines are known to have existed in the county. As the fledgling industry grew, it was Newcastle upon Tyne that became the main port for coal shipments out of the region. In 1384, King Richard II gave a Royal Charter[36] to the Bishop of Durham for mooring ships and unloading and loading of coal on the river Tyne. The resulting development of the coal fields of the northeast of England and the accompanying need to ship the coal out by sea can be considered as the main reason for the building of some of the earliest lighthouses[37] in medieval England. Of special note is that this seems to have been the first time a pair of leading lights was formally set up to aid navigation into port by showing a line to steer. It seems also to have been the first recorded occasion when a planned funding model was set in place by the charging of light dues. With a proper management plan that included the employment of a light

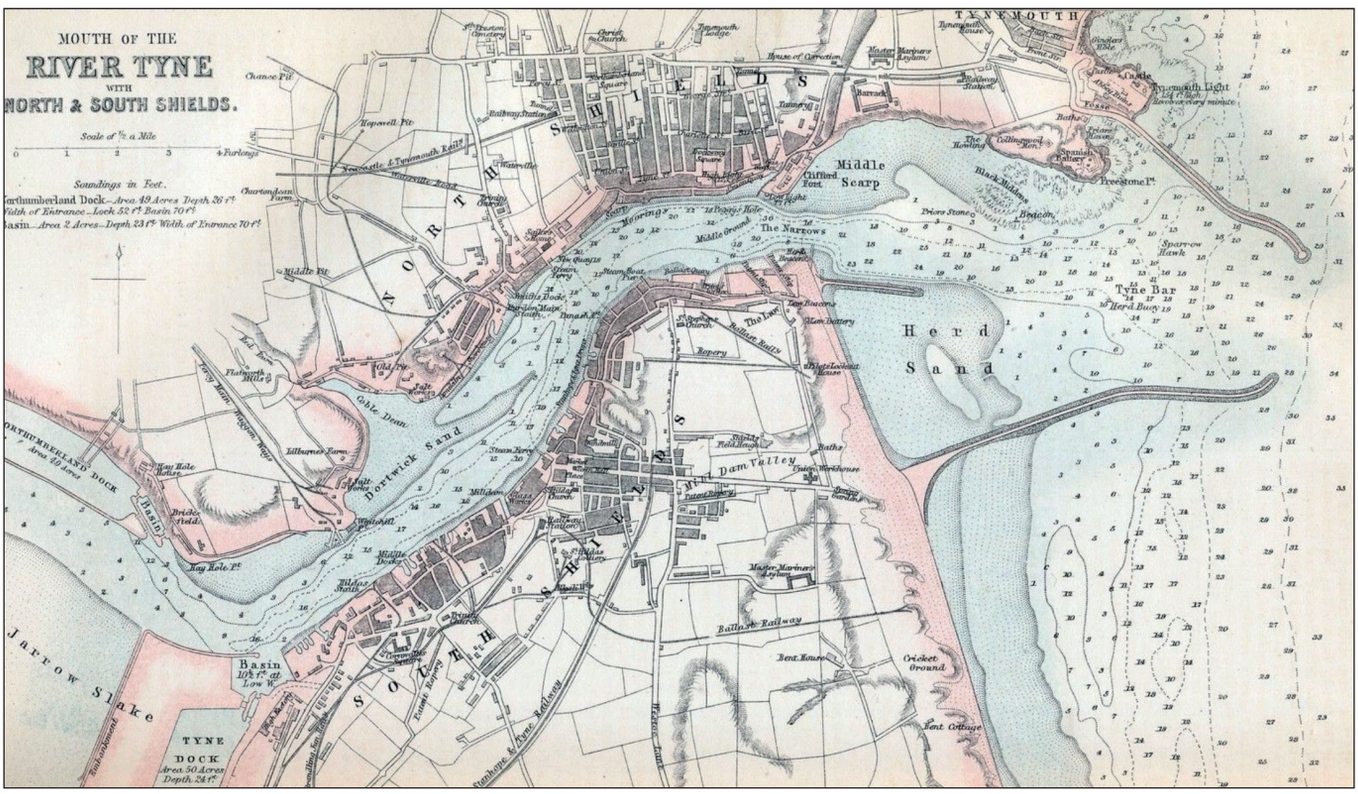
Top: The Trinity House of Newcastle upon Tyne.
Above: The entrance arch.

Above: The coat-of-arms above the arch stating: Rebuilt A.D. 1841.

keeper who would show the light every night, by any standard, these North Shields lights were of major significance in the history of lighthouses. The purpose of the two lights was to show a line to steer into the Tyne whilst avoiding a shingle bank known as the Tynemouth Barre. In common with most such obstacles in the sea, the hazard moved fairly frequently and so the alignments were in frequent need of change, a problem that was inconsistent with permanent location of structures. Naish says that the lower light was for a time replaced with a moveable wooden structure.

The Brethren of Trinity House were slowly expanding their activities to improve navigation and this included the clearance of sand and silt from the Tyne. By the time Henry VII (1485-1509) spent some time in residence in Newcastle in 1487, he became convinced of the positive work carried out by the Trinity House. In 1492, the fraternity title was changed to *The Society of Masters and Mariners of the Trinity House of Newcastle upon Tyne* and the King gave rights to the Brethren to charge local taxes on shipping to help pay for their improvements to navigation. Trinity House at last became a corporate body. Under Henry VIII, the Brethren took on the responsibility for pilotage in 1530 and received a Charter of Incorporation from him in 1536, by which time the institution was responsible for *primage, buoyage and pilotage*. And it was in 1540 that the two lighthouses at North Shields were commissioned, showing their lights the same year.

In 1584, Elizabeth I made it a perpetual brotherhood with the new name of *The Master, Pilots and Seamen of the Trinity House of Newcastle upon Tyne.*[38] In 1606, James I extended the Charter further by extending the jurisdiction over a much greater length of coast from Whitby to the Scottish border.



Above - Ralph Gardner's map of 'The River of Tyne' from 'England's Grievance Discovered' (1655).
Below - Satellite image of the same area showing the present location of the lighthouses marked by yellow pins.

Tyne Lighthouses

With regard to lighthouses in the time of Henry VIII, we arrive here at a significant year, for it was his 1536 Charter that authorized the Newcastle Trinity House to:

> *" ... build and imbattle two towers, one at the entrance of the haven of Tyne, the other on the hill adjoining, in each of which a light was to be maintained every night, for the support of which they were empowered to receive 4d for every foreign ship and 2d for every English vessel entering the port of Tyne."* [39]

This is of great significance to us as a very early reference to three principles of lighthouse provision:

The maintenance of a light, not on a casual basis but every night

The right to tax shipping in respect of the provision.

The use of two lights that, in alignment, indicate a safe channel.

The tax with regard to lights was called *lightage* or *light dues*. We should note that this has arisen in one other instance at Youghal in Ireland (see p105), and it would seem therefore to have become an established practice. Unfortunately, there was no indication of how the lights were to be achieved besides the building of towers; there was no hint of the employment of men as lightkeepers.

Although outside the time scope of this book, it is worthwhile to summarize some of the nineteenth century events relevant to all of the Trinity Houses.

In 1833, the Government set up a study of activities of the Newcastle Trinity House and one of the Commissioners reported that a surplus in the accounts was wise in view of the possibility that the House might be called upon to rebuild its lighthouses following damage. It said that:

> *" ... the erection of those had cost upwards of £22,000; one of them was a good way in the sea and it was possible that, some time or other, it might be destroyed by the prevalence of stormy weather."* [40]

Responsibility of the Trinity House for any other lighthouse was not mentioned and it is clear that the Trinity House of Newcastle upon Tyne was only responsible for what were known as the lighthouses at North Shields and not for any light coming from Tynemouth Castle.[41] The period from 1850 to 1895 contained a forty-five year plan of work to improve the Tyne waterways. Included in the plans was the building of additional harbour lights and other navigational aids. The massive cost of £11.25m was nevertheless money well-spent for the future of Newcastle as one of the UK's leading ports.

Meanwhile, the ancient rights of various bodies to tax activities on the river came under the spotlight during the 1850s. Indeed, it had become apparent that the issue had become nationwide over previous centuries and that it was time for Parliament to impose a measure of uniformity.

Above: The Low[42] *lighthouse at North Shields, situated in the Fish Quay Market. Now discontinued, it served as a leading light into the Tyne. The earliest tower was built on a slightly different site, now lost to time.*

The exact dates of these important lighthouses are hard to state. On the LEFT ABOVE is the earliest surviving High lighthouse. There is no evidence of a sister Low light, which we know existed, was moveable and may have been demolished and replaced. English Heritage gives the date of this building as 1727, but it must have existed in some form in 1540 and is likely to have been rebuilt on the same site or very close by. ABOVE RIGHT is the replacement High lighthouse and the date on the building is 1808. The image BELOW is taken from the site of the second High light (1808) and its sister Low lighthouse, shown on p145, is in the Fish Quay Market at the level close to the harbour. The alignment of these two leading lights is clear from the photograph. The first High light is on the left. Three other modern lights are visible: The north and south Tynemouth harbour lights, and the red lighthouse on the right known as Tynemouth Herd.

Above: The top image is an enlargement taken from a map of the River Tyne shown in full in the lower image. It was drawn in 1651 by Wenceslaus Hollar.[43] *Two leading lights are indicated marking the entrance into the river and are labelled as High Lights and Loo Lights. These have become known as the lights of North Shields. We should note that both structures appear similar, of the same height and square in cross-section. We note also the large number of ship symbols in the river below North Sheelds. In the top right is Tynmouth Castle and although it is not marked as such, we might guess that the lone tower farthest right is the Tynemouth lighthouse, though it might simply not be shown.*

Above: The Trinity House of Kingston Upon Hull

The Trinity House Of Kingston Upon Hull

The Humber Estuary[44] has been one of the largest arterial waterways of England since the end of the last Ice Age, entering the land at Spurn Point and then proceeding in a meandering, mud-laden course approximately northwest until it takes up a due easterly direction. Here it meets a tributary called the River Hull, which arrives at the confluence via a southerly course through the heart of what is now Yorkshire. The ease of navigation of this waterway was clearly of great benefit to indigenous peoples.

It seems that the origin of port facilities on the Humber came about when monks of Meaux Abbey[45] sought to export their wool to the Humber via the River Hull. The result was a small port on the River Hull called Wyke on Hull. The story of the creation of Hull[46] tells that in 1299 Edward I had enjoyed hunting along the Humber valley and purchased the land of present-day Hull from the Abbot of Meaux Abbey. The king had a manor hall built for himself, issued proclamations encouraging development within the town, and bestowed upon it the royal appellation, King's Town - Kingstown upon Hull. By 1369, the town had protective walls on three sides, but was open to the River Hull on the other, at its confluence with the Humber estuary and around 25 miles from the North Sea. Surprisingly, there were virtually no roads in the area and almost all of the activities necessary for communities to go about the essential businesses of trade were done by water. So, the location of Hull was very favourable for trading links with Scotland, Scandinavia and Germany, and its popularity as a seaport was secured over many centuries.

In 1369, forty-nine men and women formed themselves into a Guild in honour of the Holy Trinity. Their names are recorded on a document known as the *First Subscription* dated 4 June 1369, which also describes the conditions of membership. As well as an agreement to help each other, it was necessary to make communal contributions to further the aims and objectives of the group that were also directed towards provision of charity to the poorest people in the community. The building of almshouses to accommodate the homeless, for example, was an important part of their activities, as well as the establishment of hospitals. The provision of pensions for the old and education for the young were also embraced as time passed. The membership dues collected were known as *primage*. At first, the membership was not necessarily related to seamen or shipowners but the collection of primage from the loading and unloading of ships in increasingly busy ports seemed an obvious way of increasing the income for the guild.

The first royal charter of rights and privileges was given to the guild by Henry VIII in 1541. More formally, the name was "The Guild or Fraternity of Masters and Pilots, Seamen of the Trinity House of Kingston-Upon-Hull." In 1581, the guild assumed the name of "Trinity House of Kingston Upon Hull."

ABOVE: Entry to the ports of the Humber estuary has always been problematic owing to the numerous sandbanks and their movements, exacerbated by the ever-changing geography of Spurn Point. In the early years, channels were marked by easily recognizable buoys. The only light shown in the medieval period was the Spurn light of 1674. Over time, lights were slowly added such that two main lines of approach were indicated by leading lights at Killingholme and a second pair at Thorngumbald Clough. An extra light was built at Paull. The locations shown here are by no means the only ones of significance and the marks used for the upper Humber are as numerous but not described here.

The first Royal Charter was followed by similar confirmatory charters given by Edward VI (1547), Mary (1554), Elizabeth I (1567, 1581), James I (1607), Charles I (1631), Charles II (1661), William IV (1831, 1836).[47]

The fraternity[48] pledged themselves to be present in the church of Holy Trinity in Hull on the day of Holy Trinity and to carry the guild's candles. The penalty for absence without reasonable cause was one pound of wax. With a membership subscription of two shillings per year, they also bound themselves to help each other in poverty and sickness.

Until 1456, the guild had comprised men and women from various walks of life, including tradesmen, chaplains, and vicars, as well as mariners, but in 1456 it was agreed that the guild would no longer accept members who were not mariners.[49] By then the membership had expanded to include mariners and it was now that twenty-four ship masters agreed with the vicar of the Holy Trinity Church in Hull to maintain a chantry there and to build an almshouse. It was therefore by means of a gradual process that the guild activities became increasingly directed towards the welfare of seafarers such that by 1581 the membership was taken entirely from the seafaring community and the focus towards the welfare of mariners was essentially complete. The guild's powers now included responsibility for all pilotage in the River Humber.

Storey reports that in 1541, Henry VIII had personally witnessed a Scotsman experiencing difficulty in bringing the King's ship into the Haven of Hull. He later commanded that all ships should be guided into the port by a Brother of the Trinity House.[50] [51]

Early Records Of Buoyage And Beacons

It is easy to see that the Humber estuary is a very large expanse of water. What is harder to see, except perhaps at very low tides, is that it is strewn with mud banks and other hazards that have made its safe navigation very difficult. Our study of the medieval period is inevitably short on historical detail for reasons that are obvious, much of it lost in the mists of time or the upheavals of conflict.

What can happen, however, is for meaningful extrapolations to be made by consideration of what is known about activities elsewhere, given that, even in these distant times, news spread quickly far and wide with the result that practices that were obviously useful in one area were adopted in another - sooner or later! But there is no doubt that the commonality of objectives amongst the various guilds, brotherhoods and fraternities were shared by intercourse amongst them.

The Trinity House of London suffered significant losses of records during catastrophic episodes in its history. The same was not true at Hull and there have been a number of useful publications from which we can draw important conclusions, not necessarily about the more obvious lighthouses, but of the less reported (though still important) implementations of buoys, beacons and other seamarks. This will be discussed further when we report on the history of the Wash (see p297).

The building of lighthouses was an expensive undertaking and in the early days of the Trinity Houses, even though they had been given the powers to do so, there was a protracted delay while the Brothers, being careful with the cash that was earmarked for charity, observed the progress made by motivated individuals. One such man was Richard Reedbarowe, a hermit living at Spurn Point (or Ravenspurne as it was then known). Here is one of the best examples of the situation already discussed (see p288) in which a man with Christian principles recognized the need to help mariners.

In 1427, he petitioned Parliament for permission to levy dues on ships entering the Humber from the sea. This request was in recognition of his construction of a tower that served as a beacon by day and a light by night, intended to guide vessels safely through the estuary's channels.

> *"... havying compassion and pitee of the Cristen poeple that ofte tymes are there perisched... hath begunne in weye of charite, in Salvacion of Cristen poeple, Godes and Marchaundises comying into Humbre, to make a Toure to be uppon day light a redy Bekyn, wheryn shall be light gevyng by nyght, to alle the Vesselx that comyn into the seid Ryver of Humbre".*[52]

Finding that his venture could not be "brought to an ende withouten grete cost" he petitioned the King for help. Reedbarrowe was granted permission by Letters Patent of King Henry VI on 28 November 1427 for a period of ten years. This early initiative by Reedbarrowe predates the more formal lighthouse systems that were established in the region during

Above: The old lighthouse at Paull is still to be seen on the banks of the Humber. Trinity House of Kingston Upon Hull built Paull lighthouse in 1836. The lighthouse was taken out of use in 1870 when the sandbanks moved and caused the channel to shift - when this happened new lighthouses were built at Thorngumbald Clough.

Above: In 1878, Adams wrote: "The old Paull lighthouse is now disused, but at Thorngumbald Clough, half a mile to the south, two lighthouses were erected in 1870 - the high lighthouse, red, fifty feet high, the low lighthouse, a circular tower, yellow, thirty feet high." [58]

the 17th century, such as the pair of lighthouses erected by Justinian Angell in the 1670s (see p289).

It is one thing to build a sturdy structure on good foundations ashore, but yet another in locations where the objective is to mark severe shallows and other obstacles in waters where the tides can be changing significantly perhaps twice a day. This problem is encountered time and again in the study of pharology. Thus, in parallel with discussions about the robust mighty lighthouse towers, we need also to consider from time to time the methods used to set lights where they are actually in the water. Whether they float or mounted on poles pummeled into the river bed generally depends upon the depths of water or the currents encountered. Whilst I do not consider such marks in general to be identified as lighthouses, the area of overlap is such as to demand our attention, particularly in parts of the world where shallows are common and where the installation of leading lights is invoked. This is especially true along the coasts of the North Sea.

The presence of sandbanks in the Humber, possibly close to Paull, was the reason for the erection of a wooden beacon in 1567. This is the earliest known record of a navigational aid in the remit of the Hull Trinity House. It would appear not to have been lit but used as a daymark only, for in these contexts, the use of the word beacon almost always indicated a daymark - that is, unlit.

Following the Elizabeth I Charter of 1581, from 1585, a system of buoys, sometimes written as *boys* or known as *cannes* was brought into use on the Rivers Humber and Ouse under the control of the (Hull) Trinity House, and vessels were charged taxes for making use of them as they sailed to and from port. Because there are so few early records of such navigational aids, it is worthy of more detailed consideration.

One of the best sources of data in earlier times is the work of Arthur Storey (1971), an Elder Brother of the Hull Trinity House. There is no doubt that the great extent of the Humber estuary and the complexity of its sandbanks gave rise to a great amount of work in keeping the waters marked for daytime use, even without considering lights.

The composition of the *canne* can only be surmised from the old items referring to it which are spread over a number of years. Mention is made of timber, spikes and nails being used; of tar and pitch being applied; of iron hoops and of a stone and a chain to anchor it. There are frequent entries telling of the smith being paid for ironwork about the *canne*, of it being trimmed, and of the mending and the setting on it of the gridiron or iron trivet known as a *brandrith* as the top mark. The *canne* was a floating object made of timber and iron, moored

in position by a stone and chain. It was of conical shape with the mooring stone connected at the apex and floating base uppermost. It was handled by four, five and six men, and tarred by three men. In 1592 the *canne* was at the Den end, a very small island or sandbank near Spurn and was probably a predecessor of the existing shoal known as 'Old Den'. It was a very exposed position and the *canne* was occasionally swept away and damaged.

In 1592 a beacon was set up at the Bircom (Birthom) sand, a shoal lying off Grimsby. In the same year a beacon was erected at the Den end. These beacons were protected to a certain degree from the ravages of the sea and river by stones deposited round the bases.

In 1613 the Hull Brethren made another beacon that was set up at the Den by obtaining a half barrel, fitting two iron hoops round it, filling it with stones and erecting a mast in it. Soon after this time (1613) the word "buoy" comes into the records of the Hull Trinity House and an entry of 1618 reads " ... going down to the Den buoy and beacon." The buoy was not yet another name for the *canne* as later entries mention them as separate marks. The Brethren were maintaining the *canne*, beacons and the buoy, all home-made. Then in 1621 they bought a buoy from Holland for £11-9s-4d (£11.47).

On December 10, 1647 the Brethren agreed with a boatman of Paull to set up and maintain a beacon at Bircom, with the House undertaking to provide the pole or small mast of 30 feet in length. This new beacon was to replace the one set up by the Brethren which had several times been repaired and reset.

There are frequent references to the general maintenance of beacons and similar entries concerning the *canne*, but it is not until 1667 that another buoy called the Clee Ness buoy is recorded on the south side of the river, almost opposite Spurn. The word *canne* does not appear in the records after 1640 and it seems that the item was thereafter called a buoy.

Maintenance was constantly required. On September 7, 1656, two of the Brethren were ordered to repair the Birkham (Bircom) Beacon and the entry of 27 February, 1662 reads:

> *"Ordered buoy to be placed where Birkham Sand beacon stood and has been drifted away, until a new beacon be got."*

Another entry for 7 August, 1667 tells of the Brethren taking buoys to Burcom and Clee Ness sands.

When a buoy was brought back to the house for repairs, generally because it had become waterlogged through leakage, the tar and pitch was scraped off the outside, and the buoy, which was made of wood and bound with iron hoops, was drained and dried. Then the damaged part was made good and the buoys stuffed with peat turfs[53] and thrums[54], that is, rope ends - stuffing to give extra buoyancy should water get inside, as turfs and thrums have a lower density than water. The crown of the buoy was refitted on the end, all seams and joints were pitched, and the whole of the outside tarred.

When a mooring stone was required the Brethren often bought worn out millstones. The hole in the centre was plugged in order to secure one end of the mooring chain and the other end of the chain was fixed to the buoy. With the mooring chain and stone fitted, the buoy was taken back to its station and set in position.

Taking a buoy from the house to its position was no light task. As the Brethren had no boat of their own, they hired one and men to handle it. Men were paid to take the buoy, chain and stone to the water's edge in the old harbour and load them into the boat. The boatmen and the Brethren who were to take the buoy down river had a meal before they set off and took with them a supply of food which generally included some ale, as the length of the trip was unpredictable and depended upon wind and tides.[55] But decisions for new placements were always required. It was in 1667 that the Brethren placed a buoy on the Middle Sand, as the record of 20 May reads:

> *"It is ordered that forthwith a buoy be laid and placed upon the southern edge of middle ground in the Humber and a stone and other necessaires be forthwith gotten to that purpose."* [56]

A note in the margin of the book says that this order was made at the request of Captains of men-of-war. The Burcom and Clee Ness buoys were exposed to the severe weather of the east coast and there are records of them being washed away and having to be replaced. In 1671 one was found at Sheringham (Norfolk) and in 1674 another was found washed up at Kilnsea. Whether it was for the want of money or whether they wanted to reserve

Above Left: Three 19th c leading lights at Killingholme on the Humber estuary (see p149).
Above Right: A close-up image of the lighthouse in the far right of the image Above Left.

the skill of navigating the river to themselves, the Brethren seem to have been very slow in laying new buoys, although in 1674 when the New Sand was found outside Spurn, it was immediately marked with a buoy for the Trinity House of London.

Not all of the buoys were constructed locally, as the record of 22 August, 1682 reads:

> *"Ordered George Dickinson to buy at Hamburg a good buoy of length 9 feet 6 inches, or as near as can be got. The head to be 4 feet 6 inches from the outside to the outside."* [57]

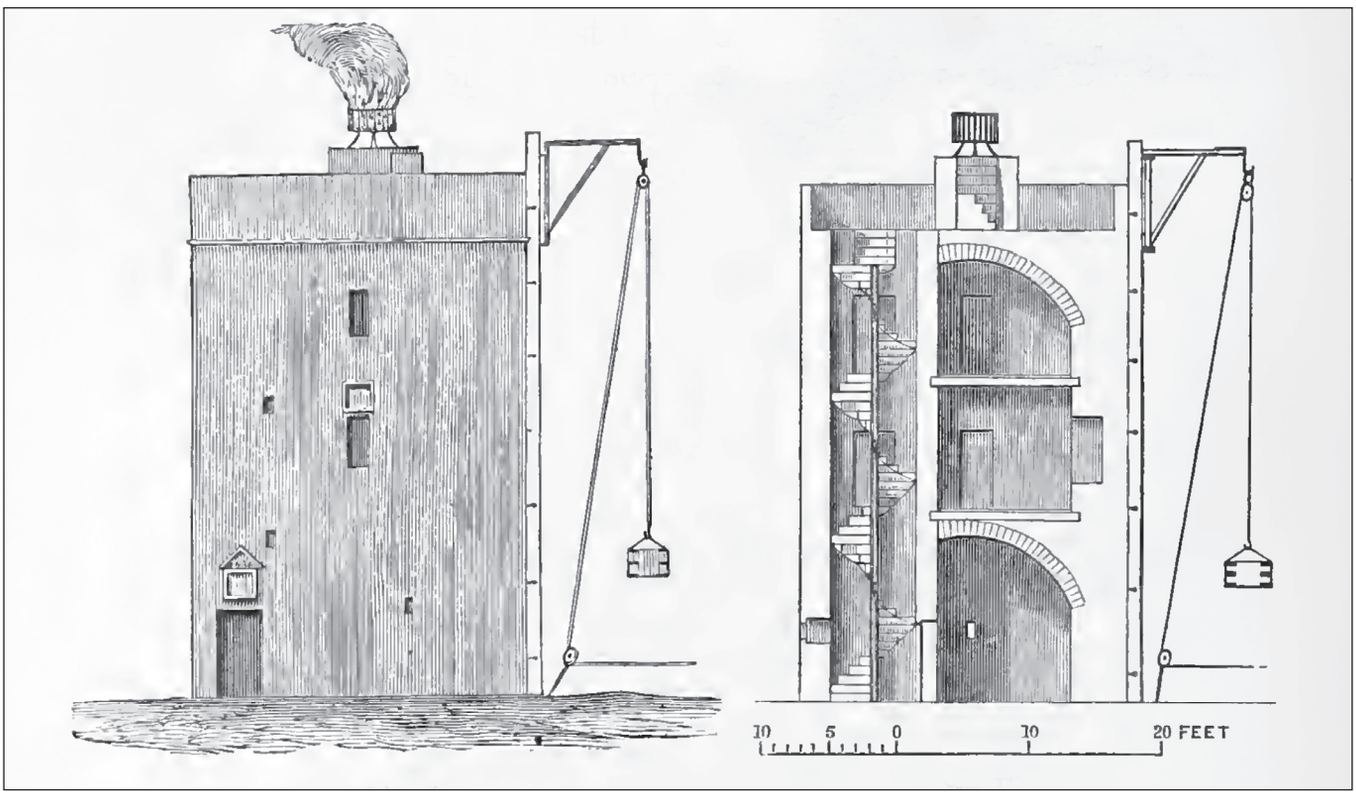
A note at the side of the entry dated 27 November, 1682, states that Mr Dickinson had procured the buoy and was paid £13-8 shillings (£13.40).

The Brethren continued to exercise their responsibility during the 18th century and added further navigational aids. By 1732 there were buoys on the Bull, Clee Ness, Burcom and Middle Sands. There is a record of laying a new buoy in 1734 in Whitebooth Roads and another on Foul Holme Sand in 1735. It is noticeable that after the laying of each of these two buoys the charge for buoyage was increased. Presumably the Brethren increased the buoyage charge to shipping every time they placed a buoy in a new position and so ensured sufficient revenue for maintenance and replacement.

The various crises in national affairs in the 18th century involved the Brethren in considerable extra trouble with the buoys. An incident regarding the buoys occurred during the rebellion in 1745 when the mayor asked the brother in to take up the buoys in case rebel ships tried to reach Hull. A record in the order book dated September 12, 1748, referring to this occasion, reads:

> *"A memorandum stating that whereas in the late rebellion in 1745 this house at the request of the mayor and all the man of this town to prevent the ships of the enemy from coming up the Humber to annoy this town, took up the buoys in the Humber and after the danger was over like them down again, the said mayor and all the man promising to pay the charges of the same. And whereas the house relying upon such a promise did necessarily expend and pay to the person is employed, £58.10 shillings as per account and since that time several applications both in public and private have been made to them, but absolutely refuse to pay the same. Therefore to perpetuate the said transaction and to the like imposition in the future, this and she is made to the intent that it may be in the minds of those that hereafter shall be wardens, elder brother in and assistance of this house when the present ones shall be silent in the grave."*

Again in 1779 when a hostile fleet commanded by Paul Jones was off the Humber, The Brethren had boats lying at the buoys ready to lift them, but such action was not required.



Above: The medieval lighthouse on the Isle of May. The light was made by burning coal in a roof-top brazier, but the light was erratic and inefficient and often mistaken for other coal fires ashore, notably those in various lime kilns and coalfields. Even being given the largest brazier in Britain after complaints in 1786, it continued to cause trouble.

The Trinity House Of Leith

Scottish seamen were just like their colleagues the world over - aware of their exposure " ... to hourly hazards and the fear of extreme poverty and beggary." [59] Again, without absolute proof, but with strong conviction, the brothers of the Leith Trinity House believe that their earliest formal grouping goes back to 1380. For insurance against their concerns they determined to tax ships doing business in the port with an amount they called *prime gilt* that was intended to relieve the poor, aged and infirm members of seafaring families. All monies attract nefarious practices and, as difficulties in collecting the money increased, this charitable objective was strongly supported and enforced by Mary Queen of Scots with an order stamped with the Privy Seal in 1566.

The significant difference between the Trinity House of Leith and London was to be that the London Corporation was given full responsibility for the building of lighthouses, whilst the Leith House was not. In Scotland, the responsibility for lighthouses was taken up by the Northern Lighthouse Board by Act of Parliament in 1786. Before that the lighthouses had been built individually through private enterprise, the first of which was on the Isle of May in 1566. As the need for other lights was identified the Brethren of Leith Trinity House generally acted as advisers, a role that continued long after the formation of the NLB.

The Firth of Forth was naturally the first sea area of concern for maritime safety since its waters led to the harbour of Leith that served the nation's capital. The harbour belonged to the city and its management and maintenance were the responsibility of the Council, not the Trinity House. The income for the House's charitable works came from the aforesaid collection of harbour taxes, not through light dues since they had not erected the lights. On one occasion when they were invited to contribute a substantial sum to the rebuilding of the inadequate medieval lighthouse on the Isle of May, the brethren declined to do so on the grounds that it posed too great a risk to the finances of the charity.

Thus, within the scope of this book, the Trinity House of Leith made only a minor contribution to the erection of new lights in Scotland as they focused their efforts on their charitable functions.

The Cinque Ports

In the previous chapter we concentrated on the association of European cities called the Hanseatic League. In England, a much smaller but effective confederation of coastal towns in Kent and Sussex, originally, Hastings, New Romney, Hythe, Dover, and Sandwich was called the Cinque Ports. This did not, however, come about because a perceived benefit to merchants and traders, but rather because of their strategic position facing the English Channel.

The purpose was defensive at root. Before England had a permanent navy, the Crown relied on these towns to provide ships and crews for defence and transport. In return, the ports were granted special privileges such as tax exemptions, a measure of self-governance, and trading rights. The story of this association - which could not be described as a guild, brotherhood or fraternity because it was initiated by national government rather than private citizens - was strongly influenced by significant changes to the coastline in the western region that may have been more to do with changes to the levels of both land and sea than to the usual processes of erosion of soft coastline. As the coastline shifted, harbours silted up which forced change upon the structure and additional towns were drawn in such as Rye, Winchelsea, Deal, Folkestone, Lydd and Seaford. Rye and Winchelsea, added in the 12th–13th centuries, became especially important once Old Winchelsea had been destroyed by storms in 1287. The Confederation developed its own system of governance under a Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports, who represented royal authority and had naval, judicial, and administrative powers. At the height of their activities in the 13th-14th centuries, the Cinque Ports were effectively the naval backbone of medieval England. They provided ships for royal campaigns, including invasions of France and defence against raids. But with the convenience of well-founded ports, they also became wealthy trading centres, especially in the cross-Channel trade with Normandy and Flanders.

By the 15th-17th centuries, their usefulness was waning as the rise of a standing Royal Navy reduced their military importance. Harbours at New Romney and Sandwich continued to degrade by the accumulation of silt which diminished their commercial value. Some ports, like Dover, were able to adapt and remained important; others dwindled to small towns. The Cinque Ports retained their ceremonial and constitutional roles long after their military function faded.

This rather obscure topic is very important for several reasons. Thanks to some excellent research by Hague and Christie[60] we have confirmation that taxes were levied on shipping using the Cinque Ports in 1261. The precise reference found by them (translated from the original Latin) is now available to us all on the internet.[61]

> *"Jan. 30. Westminster.*
>
> *Grant, for two years from the Purification next, to the barons of Winchilse that from every ship putting into the ports of Winchilse laden with merchandise, they shall take 2d (two pence) for the maintenance of a light (luminaris) which they have in their port for the safety of sailors putting in there by night; unless the said barons ought to maintain the said light at their own expense."*

We have already called the tax, light dues (see p136) but in this instance it appears that the tax was called firpenyes or fire-pence with the clear implication that the money was to pay for the fire.

The second important point is the clarification that these ports were indeed lit at night at such an early point in history. The use of a light at Winchelsea would have been sufficiently beneficial for it to have been copied elsewhere, probably at least to the other Cinque ports. We have citations of lights at Rye and Yarmouth, for example. We should remember that in the medieval period a "light" was often a fire on a tower, church, or temporary cresset rather than a purpose-built masonry lighthouse and we have no details about the form or exact location in these instances. We cannot exclude the likelihood that the fire was shown by members of religious orders, i.e. they were ecclesiastical by our earlier definition. Neither does it negate the possibility that "civilian" light keepers were actually paid to do the work. It would be easy to ask why - if they were so useful - all ports and harbours did not have lights? Remember that these ports just mentioned were susceptible to significant silting and the build-up of sand, shingle and the consequent formation and movement of channels. This could be the reason why lights might have been considered to be essential at these locations.

Three of the four lighthouses in Dover harbour are shown here. There are no records of lighthouses in the harbour before the nineteenth century, yet there must have been fire-lights that guided ships into such a busy Cinque Port. We conclude that they were considered too obvious to require formal descriptions.

Conclusions

1. The formation of Guilds, Brotherhoods and Fraternities can be traced back at least to Roman times, but began to emerge again in Anglo-Saxon times.

2. Guilds became the dominant social structure, often requiring payment of a membership fee and acquiring varying degrees of civil power.

3. A number of Trinity Houses came into existence in Great Britain in the early sixteenth century and received royal recognition.

4. Trinity Houses were awarded special privileges, including the right to erect and install aids to navigation and to charge taxes on those who benefited from them.

5. The word 'lighthouse' entered the English language in the early 17th century, coinciding with an increase in the rate of building these structures.

6. In 1536, Henry VIII authorized the building of two lighthouses at North Shields. They were the first English lighthouses with:

(a) A management plan;
(b) The employment of keepers;
(c) The showing of lights every night;
(d) The charging of light dues to help pay for the provision of the lights;
(e) The use of leading lights.

7. Following authorization by Elizabeth I in 1566, the first lighthouse built by Trinity House (London) was at Dungeness in 1609.

8. The earliest record so far found for tolls to be charged to ship masters using lights has been established in 1261 and shows that the principle of funding lights to assist navigators was established at least as early as the mid-13th century.

Notes

1 Whittock, p77.

2 Such a management organization at national level is now called a General Lighthouse Authority (GLA).

3 There is no consensus in English as to the use of the hyphen in the names Newcastle upon Tyne and Kingston upon Hull. Both are frequently hyphenated, but in this work I shall not use hyphens.

4 There was a maritime organization in Dover. Established in 1526 by Sir Edward Guildeford, the Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports, this institution was tasked with overseeing pilotage and navigation in the region. Unlike the Trinity Houses in Deptford Strond (London), Hull, and Newcastle, the Dover establishment did not operate under a royal charter but functioned under the authority of the Lord Warden, leveraging the general charter of the Cinque Ports. https://www.dovermuseum.co.uk/Information-Resources/Articles--Factsheets/Cinque-Port-Pilots.aspx?utm_source=chatgpt.com. The Trinity House of Dover played a crucial role in managing the Cinque Ports Pilots, who were responsible for guiding vessels safely through the challenging waters of the English Channel, particularly between Dungeness and London Bridge. Over time, the responsibilities and operations of the Dover institution were integrated into those of the Trinity House of Deptford Strond. This consolidation was formalized by an Act of Parliament in 1853, leading to the dissolution of the Trinity House of Dover.

5 There is historical evidence of a Trinity House in Aberdeen, though its nature and function differed from those of the Trinity Houses in London and Leith. In Aberdeen, the term "Trinity" is primarily associated with the Trinity Friars' Monastery, a religious institution founded between 1198 and 1216 by King William I and Queen Ermengarde. The monastery was established to support poor pilgrims and to help ransom captives in the Holy Land during the Third Crusade.

6 Mead, p8-9.

7 Mead, p7.

8 Mead, undated, ca1945.

9 Moir, 1959.

10 Storey, 1967.

11 Mason, 1957.

12 Once again, we include all lighthouses and lightstructures, as well as buoys and other navigational aids. There may be some element of delegated local responsibility to harbour masters, but the GLAs are in

overall charge of them.

13 There remain a few oddities because of the British Imperial past. Full discussion is beyond the scope of this book.

14 This GLA is no longer part of any Trinity House.

15 We note that despite the UK government being politically responsible for Northern Ireland, all lighthouses on the island of Ireland are within the jurisdiction of the CIL in Dublin.

16 Grosvenor, p85.

17 Grosvenor, p85.

18 www.etymonline.com 7/3/2017

19 Grosvenor, p87. We note that the use of lights to guide mariners was clearly understood in this 13th century. We will later discuss how the London Trinity House did not actually take up the building of lighthouses until 1609!

20 Mike Palmer: Eddystone 300: The Finger of Light (1998) p9 Palmridge Publishing

21 Grosvenor, p86.

22 A similar formation of groups sharing the same interests were the Worshipful Companies of England, also known as livery companies. They began as medieval guilds that regulated trades and crafts in towns and cities, particularly in London. These guilds first emerged in the 12th century, with some tracing their origins even earlier. However, they became formally recognized through royal charters starting in the 14th and 15th centuries. Key milestones in the development of Worshipful Companies: 1. Early Guilds (11th–12th centuries) - Trade associations formed to regulate their professions, maintain quality, and provide mutual aid to members. Some of these guilds had religious elements and were often linked to specific churches. 2. First Recorded Worshipful Companies (12th–13th centuries) - The Weavers' Company (circa 1130) is the first recorded trade guild in England. Other early guilds included the Mercers (before 1155) and the Goldsmiths (before 1180). 3. Royal Charters (14th–15th centuries) - Many guilds gained official royal recognition during this period. The Merchant Taylors (1327) and Drapers (1361) received royal charters from Edward III. - The Goldsmiths (1327) were also officially recognized around this time. 4. Establishment of the Great Twelve Livery Companies (15th century) - By this time, the leading companies had emerged, including the Mercers, Grocers, Drapers, Fishmongers, Goldsmiths, and Skinners. - The Lord Mayor of London was often selected from these leading companies. By the 16th and 17th centuries, the livery companies began losing their strict trade monopolies due to economic and legal changes, but they remained influential in civic life, charity, and education. Today, many still exist as charitable institutions with historical and ceremonial roles in London.

23 Grosvenor, p90.

24 Barrett, book cover.

25 Barrett, p4.

26 The management of pilots was also called loadmanage. This has also been discussed with reference to Dover on p79.

27 The word lighthouse is a relatively recent (20th century?) spelling. When used in earlier centuries it was almost always Light House or Light-House.

28 The Oxford English Dictionary states that the earliest evidence for the use of the word lighthouse is from 1606, in an unofficial obscure document identified as the Mariners' Charter. This may have been either a navigation-related proclamation, possibly referring to licensing or regulation of maritime activity or a printed set of instructions or privileges for mariners, possibly concerning safe passage or duties related to lighthouses or ports.

29 For those who created written documents in Latin and Greek, it was usual to use the word 'pharos' which had been universally adopted by scholars from the Classical scriptures. It was not commonplace to use this word when speaking in English and the word beacon was used at first. It cannot have been the case that the word lighthouse was used merely to represent a candle in a window or in a hand-held or pole-mounted lantern.

30 Harris: 480 folio 92V dated 25 March 1635.

31 Harris: 211 dated 1 December 1623.

32 Moir, facing p53.]

33 Moir, p1.

34 Moir, p2. Stevenson states that the Guild at Newcastle had been in existence in 1492.

35 England's northeast website: https://englandsnortheast.co.uk/CoalMiningandRailways.html

36 Wikipedia, 20190909, Royal Charter. A Royal Charter is an instrument of incorporation, granted by a monarch, which confers independent legal personality on an organisation and defines its objectives, constitution and powers to govern its own affairs.

37 These structures fit within my definition of lighthouses rather than mere lightstructures because they consisted of candles shown from windows, according to Naish, p71.

38 Moir, p20.

39 Moir, p17. The 2d and 4d refer to pre-1971 UK currency where 1d = 0.416p.

40 Moir, p37-8.

41 Even this author has been fooled into thinking that these towers were the same as lights at Tynemouth. We should be careful not to confuse North Shields with Tynemouth which, in the past (perhaps less so today) were very different locations.

42 It is worth noting that the words High and Low when applied to leading lights do NOT refer to the height of the tower, but the height of the light above the sea.

43 British Museum Number Q,6.125. Map by Wenceslaus Hollar (1607-1677). https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_Q-6-125

44 Wikipedia - Humber: The Humber is now an estuary. When the world sea level was lower during the Ice Ages, the Humber had a long freshwater course across what was then the dry bed of the North Sea. Classical authors knew the Humber as the Abus which was one of the principal rivers, or rather estuaries in the Roman province of Maxima Caesariensis in Britain. It was reported as receiving many tributaries, and discharging itself into the German Ocean (the North Sea) south of Ocelum Promontorium (Spurn Head). Its left bank was inhabited by the Celtic tribe, whom the Romans entitled Parisi, but according to a medieval poet, no great town or city anciently stood on its banks. In the Anglo-Saxon period, the Humber was a major boundary, separating Northumbria from the southern kingdom, though at its height Northumbria did cover areas south of the Humber. The Kingdom of Lindsey, which today is Northern Lincolnshire, was part of Northumbria before being lost to Mercia. The name Northumbria came from Anglo-Saxon Norðhymbre meaning “the people north of the Humber”.

45 Meaux Abbey was a Cistercian monastery located in the East Riding of Yorkshire, near the hamlet of Meaux, approximately 6.5 miles north of Hull and 3.5 miles east of Beverley. Founded in 1151 by William le Gros, Earl of Albemarle, it became one of the wealthiest and most significant Cistercian houses in Yorkshire. The abbey was dissolved in 1539 during the Dissolution of the Monasteries under King Henry VIII.

46 Gillett and MacMahon (1989).

47 Many honourable institutions received Royal Charters—formal grants issued by the monarch to establish, legitimise, or recognise their existence, rights, and privileges. There are several key reasons why new or additional charters might have been issued as an institution’s role evolved, it often needed new legal powers, responsibilities, or recognition. Rather than amending an old document (which was not common practice in medieval or early modern law), a new charter would be granted to reflect updated functions. A college might originally be founded for the education of clergy, but later expand to include broader academic disciplines or administrative changes, warranting a new charter. Some monarchs reissued or confirmed charters as a gesture of favour, especially during regime changes. This reaffirmation served as: a show of royal support; a legal strengthening of the institution’s status under the new reign; a political act of continuity or control. Institutions might seek a new charter to reflect changes in governance, such as new governing bodies, updated rules of succession, or revised membership criteria. For example, livery companies in London sometimes received successive charters to reflect changes in their internal regulation or trade scope. Sometimes previous charters were vague, or new laws had been enacted. A fresh charter allowed for legal clarification or the consolidation of multiple earlier documents into one coherent instrument. An institution might be elevated in status (e.g., from a college to a university, or a guild to a company), requiring a new charter to formalise that change.

48 The word ‘fraternity’ is derived from the Latin word ‘frater’ meaning ‘brother’. Therefore, the members of these Trinity Houses called themselves Brethren.

49 Storey, p5.

50 Storey p37.

51 The present-day organisation is the same as that established by the Charter of Queen Elizabeth I in 1581, and consists of two Wardens, ten Elder Brothers and, six Assistants and a number of Younger Brethren.

52 de Boer, p5.

53 A peat turf is a layer of matted earth formed by grass and plant roots; a block or piece of peat normally dug for fuel.

54 A thrum is, in weaving, an unwoven end of a warp thread, or a fringe of such ends, left in the loom when the finished cloth is cut away; any short loose thread.

55 Storey, p52

56 Storey, p51-2

57 Storey, p52-3

58 WHD Adams, 1878, p144.

59 Mason, p1, p26.

60 Hague and Christie, p24.

61 Calendar of Patent Rolls, Henry III, 1258–1266, ed. H. C. Maxwell Lyte, Vol. 5 (London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1910), p. 140. At: https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015031081048&seq=198