

Lighthouses by Dennis Kelly

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It was in Henry VIII's time that the idea was developed of providing a series of warning lights along the Thames to guide mariners safely into the port of London, although the concept had its roots in earlier times, notably in the construction of the Pharos of Alexandria and the Colossus of Rhodes (although the latter may have been mythical since no remains have ever been found).

The early Thames navigational system came under the regulatory authority of Trinity House and during Elizabeth I's reign (in 1593), it was further developed to provide coastal beacons, buoys, marks and signs. Indeed, between 1681 and 1695, the whole of the coastal regions of the U.K. were charted and it was Samuel Pepys who commissioned the first two lighthouses to be built, with wood or coal fires providing the light! In Victorian times, (1836) the manufacture and installation of mirrors and lenses facilitated more efficient transfer of light out to sea and in 1731 the first lightships started to appear, which meant that they could be placed out to sea to warn mariners of off-shore shoals, sandbanks and wrecks.

Perhaps the most famous lighthouse operated by Trinity House today is the Eddystone Light with its helicopter pad atop, whose construction became a template for future lighthouse building around the U.K. It stands on 'hydraulic lime' (concrete that sets under water) and replaces an earlier failed attempt at building a structure - the remnants of which can still be seen - that could withstand the huge force of winter storms.

Lighthouses around the U.K. are no longer manned but controlled automatically from Harwich, although a certain amount of routine maintenance needs to be done on site – hence the helicopter pad for landing personnel on the structure.

Foghorns have also been replaced by Radar Beacons ("Racon"), which more accurately alert mariners to hazards at sea.

Although Dennis's presentation was more historical than technical or scientific, it was nonetheless a fascinating insight into the development of navigational aids around our coast over the centuries.

Thank you to Colin for inviting such an interesting speaker.

Janet Cato

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Thee Pharos of Alexandria
[Pharos of Alexandria on Wikipedia](#)



Eddystone lighthouse
[Lighthouses on Wikipedia](#)