



Dog Island Lighthouse

The South Island Provincial Government built Dog Island lighthouse in Foveaux Strait in 1865. James Balfour, who was employed by the Otago Provincial Council, designed it in 1863. It was lit for the first time on 1 August 1865. The light tower, built of stone quarried on the Island, is the tallest in New Zealand at approximately 36 metres. Its black and white stripes make it very visible even in bad weather.

When the tower was completed it was found to shake in the wind. By 1871 further problems included a slight lean, probably due to the peaty subsoil, and severe cracks. Because of these problems the tower was encircled with heavy timber and iron bands for a while. In 1916, due to the mortar having decayed, an outer covering of Ferro concrete was used to strengthen the tower, which still remains.

The light apparatus at Dog Island, which was provided by Stevensons of Edinburgh, was unique in that instead of a single burner they had been asked to provide a system consisting of 16 lamps each with their own lenses but grouped in the same lantern.

In 1925 this system was replaced with a single incandescent burner.



Diesel electric generators were installed in 1954 and to service the lighthouse an airstrip was built in the mid 1960's.

During the 1950s all lighthouses were converted to electricity. This led to the automation of the lighthouses and the removal of the keepers. The last keeper was withdrawn from Dog Island in 1990.

New Zealand became the first country in the world with a fully automated network of lighthouses and beacons.

The requirement for lighthouse keepers to be self-sufficient on an island station is well illustrated by the story of one of the keepers, George Gwynne. During his stay on Dog Island he was in absolute agony with toothache. As he could not get away from the Island he had to become his own dentist and had to send away to Dunedin for two pair of forceps, which he used to pull his own teeth. This was not an easy task to do yourself but no-one else was able to assist. Word spread about what George had done and other lighthouse keepers found the forceps, and George, useful too.

The lens in the Museum of Wellington City & Sea, which has been donated on loan from the Maritime Safety Authority, dates from 1925 when a single incandescent burner replaced the original 16 patent lamps. The museum also holds first generation lens.

References and further reading: *Leading Lights*, Anna Gibbons. (Available from the Museum of Wellington City & Sea Shop).
New Zealand Memories (Issue 43).