



THE OFFICES OF TRINITY HOUSE
ON TOWER HILL, LONDON

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LES BUREAUX DE TRINITY HOUSE
A TOWER HILL, LONDRES

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TRINITY HOUSE OF ENGLAND

BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE DIRECTING COMMITTEE

IT is believed that a brief history of this well known body will be of interest to the Hydrographic Offices generally, especially as their work is so directly concerned with lighting, buoyage and the erection and preservation of sea-marks.

It may surprise many to know that the early history of the TRINITY HOUSE is intimately connected with the history of the British Royal Navy.

The earliest known document having reference to the Trinity House is dated 1512, and consists of a License to form a Guild "in honour of the Holy Trinity and St. Clement in the Church of Deptford Strond for the reformation of the Navy, lately much decayed by the admission of young men without experience, and of Scots, Flemings and Frenchmen, as loadsmen (pilots)", and in 1514, HENRY VIII incorporated the Guild under the style of „THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE MOST GLORIOUS AND UNDIVIDABLE TRINITY", this Charter being confirmed by QUEEN ELIZABETH in 1558; during the regency of EDWARD VI, 1547-1553, the name of the Guild was changed to "THE CORPORATION OF THE TRINITY HOUSE OF DEPTFORD STROND".

The first Master of the Trinity House was SIR THOMAS SPERT, Comptroller of the Navy to the King, who, in 1513, was master of the famous *Henri Grâce-à-Dieu*, usually known as the *Great Harry*.

The Trinity House, prior to the grant of their great Charter by HENRY VIII, had already set up a branch establishment at LEIGHT, in the county of ESSEX, for supplying pilots to inward-bound vessels, outward-bound vessels obtaining them from the parent establishment at DEPTFORD, which was also a Royal dockyard. During the first few

years of establishment the Trinity House concerned itself principally in supplying pilots and administering certain charitable organisations ; later on it turned its attention to the construction of piers at DOVER and SCARBOROUGH, and securing parliamentary aid to protect the harbours of DEVONSHIRE and CORNWALL from injury by the operations of the tin miners.

In the early days of its existence the Trinity House designed and built ships for the newly established Royal Navy and inspected all vessels hired or purchased for war purposes ; also no powder, shot or gun was allowed to be placed on board a vessel without its permission.

For several centuries previous to this time, one of the privileges of the LORD HIGH ADMIRAL OF ENGLAND had been the right to all profits arising from the sale of ballast taken from the RIVER THAMES, and to the dues levied for buoyage and beaconage. These rights were generally farmed out by the Admiral with, naturally, very unsatisfactory results, but in the year 1593 Lord High Admiral HOWARD surrendered all his rights over these dues into the hands of QUEEN ELIZABETH with the sole condition that she should bestow them forever on the Trinity House ; in this manner the whole rights of the above mentioned dues, which were valuable even then, but later proved a most prolific source of income, were conferred on the Trinity House.

When the ballastage was in the hands of private persons, it is obvious that their primary object was its utilisation for their own personal benefit and in the years 1732 and 1805, when the matter was the subject of an enquiry before the House of Commons, it was proved that the depth of the RIVER THAMES had been immensely improved under the management of the Trinity House ; it is to be explained that ballast was provided for the purpose of making an unladen vessel sufficiently heavy to make her return voyage and colliers, especially, required an immense amount of ballast to weight them sufficiently for this purpose, as much as 10,000 tons from the RIVER THAMES alone being required for this purpose in one week. As a rule the ballast took the form of gravel or sand dredged up from the bed of the THAMES, near WOOLWICH, it then being conveyed to the colliers in lighters belonging to the Trinity House, the payment being in accordance with the number of tons taken ; with the introduction of iron and steel ships the need of ballasting became much reduced, and the Trinity House gave up this privilege in the year 1866 ; the issue of licenses for removing ballast, and the execution of the dredging of the river are now solely in the hands of the PORT OF LONDON AUTHORITY.

The earliest entry in the books of the Trinity House is dated January 5th., 1606, and is an order to its officers at NEWCASTLE, GREAT

YARMOUTH, LYNN, HULL and BOSTON, to levy a tax of 12 pence per 100 tons on all ships using those ports, and to use the sum so obtained for the maintenance of the buoys and beacons situated between LOWESTOFT and WINTERTON.

At this period the Corporation added to their other duties that of acting as arbitrator, more especially in cases of dispute between masters of vessels and their crews; the Brethren were also called upon to deal with a much more serious matter than any which had hitherto engaged their attention, *viz.* the suppression of pirates, who, not only attacked vessels on the high seas, but also in the immediate neighbourhood of the British coast. Between the years 1609 and 1616 depredations of the Barbary Corsairs had grown so serious that, in 1619, an expedition was sent out against the renowned city of ALGIERS, Trinity House contributing the sum of £ 2,000 towards its expenses.

The Brethren practically became also the Conservators of the RIVER THAMES below LONDON BRIDGE, their authority being required before any wharves or shipyards could be constructed.

But the most important of any duties carried out by the Corporation was the preservation of sea-marks; after the accession of QUEEN ELIZABETH to the throne, in 1558, activity in naval matters was much increased and the provision and maintenance of sea-marks for the guidance of the mariner had become naturally of the greatest importance; in 1566 official reference was first made to sea-marks, and it may be assumed therefore that the employment of warning lights for the use of passing ships on the English coasts was practically unknown up to that time.

When JAMES I ascended the throne in 1603 the Guild had become very rich and powerful, and in 1604 a revised Charter was granted, which stated that the sole right of placing sea-marks belonged to the Trinity House.

There is no documentary evidence that will enable the date of the first modern lighthouse in Great Britain to be accurately fixed, but tradition has it that this distinction belongs to the two lighthouses erected at CAISTER, near GREAT YARMOUTH, in 1600; the lighthouse at LOWESTOFT was the next, being established in 1609; in 1615, authority was granted to SIR EDWARD HOWARD to erect a lighthouse at DUNGENESS.

The following is a list of Lighthouses, with dates of erection, established by the Trinity House :

Scilly Island	1680
Eddystone	1694
Milford Haven	1714
Portland	1716
St. Bees	1717
Foulness	1719
Caskets	1723
Lizard	1751

The first Lightship established by the Trinity House was that at the NORE in 1732.

There had always been a constant conflict of interests as regards the erection of lights, but in 1836 an Act of Parliament was passed empowering the Trinity House to purchase from the Crown, and redeem from all private proprietors, all interests, rights and dues derived from coast lights.

As shewing the multifarious nature of the work and importance of the Trinity House, it is interesting to note that, in the year 1621, an endeavour was made to compel the EAST INDIA COMPANY to pay their seamen their just wages and the widows the arrears of their pensions, and that four years later they unsuccessfully tried to obtain an increase of pay for the seamen of the Royal Navy; the intimate relations existing between the Royal Navy and the Trinity House about this period is shown by the fact that in the year 1626 three members of the Trinity House, assisted by three other shipping masters, were ordered to make a complete survey of the Royal Navy and report on its condition, and two years later the Trinity House supplied 300 men and 12 masters for Naval Service. In 1631, we find the Trinity House contributing a sum of £ 1,320 towards the expense of the equipment of a ship which was about to make an attempt to discover the NORTH-WEST PASSAGE; later on we find it engaged in settling a dispute which had arisen in consequence of an order prohibiting fish being carried in foreign ships from English ports; again, in the year 1643, King CHARLES I proposed to build a big ship, but the Corporation made the objection that there was no port in the kingdom able to accommodate a ship of such magnitude, at the same time reminding His Majesty that the *Great Harry* had been a failure.

In the year 1636, the Trinity House appears for the first time to have been concerned in the matter of salvage of wrecked vessels.

When the COMMONWEALTH was declared in 1649, an Act was passed by the Roundhead Parliament dissolving the Charter of the Trinity House and appointing a special Committee to take charge of its affairs, but on the accession of CHARLES II to the throne in 1660, a new Charter was

granted to the Corporation on similar lines to that granted by JAMES I.

As the eighteenth Century progressed the duties of the Corporation in connection with the Royal Navy gradually decreased, although in times of special national danger they were still of great assistance, and in the year 1797, when the mutiny of the Fleet at the NORE took place, we find that the Trinity House removed all buoys, beacons and sea-marks at the entrance of the RIVER THAMES, thus making it impossible for the mutineers to navigate the ships in safety ; later, in 1803, when invasion was threatened, the Trinity House undertook the defence of the RIVER THAMES, and for this purpose it raised and equipped a body of men sufficient to officer and man ten frigates, which were moored across the River, and, in those days, formed a sufficient barrier to prevent the passage of any enemy vessels.

In the year 1853, the direct control of funds collected from shipping tolls and dues was transferred from the Trinity House to the BOARD OF TRADE.

Up to 1874, all Masters, *i. e.* navigating officers, for the Royal Navy were examined at the Trinity House.

The original home of the Corporation was at DEPTFORD, which was then a Royal Dockyard ; it was removed later to STEPNEY and then to WATER LANE, LOWER THAMES STREET ; in 1792, the land on which the present Trinity House on TOWER HILL now stands was bought, the existing building being erected in 1798.

The principal duties of the Corporation of the Trinity House as a Public Department now are the construction, maintenance and administration of the lighthouses, light-ships, beacons and buoys on the coasts of ENGLAND AND WALES and the ESTUARY OF THE THAMES, with certain statutory jurisdiction in regard to lighthouses and other sea-marks in SCOTLAND, IRELAND and the CHANNEL ISLANDS, also the marking and removal of all wrecks which occur within the territorial limit of the waters of ENGLAND and WALES. The lighthouse at GIBRALTAR is under its jurisdiction, and, although the administration of the Imperial lights in CEYLON and MINICOY ISLAND, and the lights of the BAHAMAS, SOMBRERO ISLAND and the FALKLAND ISLANDS is under the BOARD OF TRADE, all structural work and provision of lighting apparatus and stores is carried out by the Trinity House, which is also the advisory authority on lighting affairs, designing and supplying the necessary material to many Colonies and parts of the Empire.

In January, 1924, there were under the charge of the Trinity House :

- 89 Lighthouses (including lighted beacons).
- 49 Light vessels.
- 137 Lighted buoys.
- 486 Unlighted buoys.
- 65 Unlighted beacons.

The Corporation is the chief Pilotage Authority in the UNITED KINGDOM, and the "ELDER BRETHERN" of the Corporation also act as Nautical Assessors in marine cases tried in the ADMIRALTY COURT. The present Master of the Trinity House is H. R. H. THE DUKE OF CONNAUGHT, the Deputy Master being Captain SIR H. ACTON BLAKE. The constitution of the Corporation consists of ELDER and YOUNGER BRETHERN; the latter in the early days being liable for service as masters in the Royal Navy; any officer of good standing of the Navy or Mercantile Marine is now eligible as a Younger Brother. The Elder Brethren are divided into two classes, active and honorary, each class consisting of ten members; the active members, presided over by the Deputy Master, form the BOARD which carries on the public and corporate duties of the Trinity House; these consist of retired officers of the Royal Navy and the Mercantile Marine; the honorary Elder Brethren include H. M. THE KING and H. R. H. THE PRINCE OF WALES.

In virtue of the Trinity House being the principal Pilotage Authority, it is of interest to note that its Yacht precedes the Royal Yacht on ceremonial occasions when H. M. the King visits any port in the UNITED KINGDOM.

Trinity Houses are still in existence at NEWCASTLE, HULL and LEITH, but their functions are purely local and chiefly concern the administration of marine charities.

At no time during its existence has the Trinity House been under direct Admiralty control, and during the recent War, the whole of the important work carried out by it in connection with Aids to Navigation was entirely under its own administration, but with the concurrence and assistance of the BOARD OF ADMIRALTY.

The reproduction accompanying this article shows the building in which the work of the Trinity House is now carried out.

