



The lighthouse and Keepers' quarters, bare surrounds and red painted tower and fence c. 1920.

The Keepers' quarters were demolished because of vandalism in 1956, the stone re-used to level the training walls and the new Harbour Master had a house in town.

The structure of the lighthouse tower is intact, with the addition of the stone causeway in 1864 (to counter high seas) and, although the clockwork mechanism has been removed, the original lens and cabinet, mahogany lining and imported cupola remain. A modern light which is solar powered and remotely monitored was fitted externally in 2006. The tower is protected (with the whole of Griffiths Island) by inclusion on the Victorian Heritage Register, and it is Classified by the National Trust of Australia (Victoria) and recorded on the Australian Heritage Register. Subject to extreme heat or wet weather it is regularly open for visitors during weekends in January, and some long weekends.



The Keepers' quarters, from the lighthouse c. 1936. The Flagstaff and code house (left rear) with sheds and some Shiny leaf shrubs. Note the windmill (right) for raising subterranean water.

Image credits: Port Fairy Historical Society, The Haldane Family & Marten Syme.

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GRIFFITHS ISLAND LIGHTHOUSE



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Lighthouses were established to warn vessels of danger at night, or, by standing prominent, during daylight. They also identified their location by a distinct flashing signal by use of clockwork and interrupter mechanisms to allow each light to send a unique signal, varied by colour, flashing and timing. The extent of light projection seaward also allowed the coastal lights to be discriminatory, with lower tower height and a less powerful light provided for ports, while significant lights (for ocean-going vessels) were located on prominent islands/high headlands, with taller towers and powerful lighting. Thus a sea captain could confidently locate his position by the light signal observed or identification of the prominent tower.

In addition to the almost indestructible towers to hold the light, the other major feature was the development of the Fresnel lens, a significant improvement to refract the light into a concentrated and magnified beam directed specifically to the seaward horizon. The firm of Chance Brothers, of Birmingham, produced the coastal lights, and that at Griffiths Island is a Fourth Order Catadioptric light, made in 1858.

The incidence of shipwrecks on the Victorian coast led to lights at Shortland's Bluff (1843) and Cape Otway (1848), but more were needed. An inquiry in 1856 led to lights at Cape Schanck, Port Albert, Warrnambool, Port Fairy and Portland being completed by September 1859. The Port Fairy light was located on the then separate Rabbit Island and an acre of land was duly purchased from James Atkinson for £100.



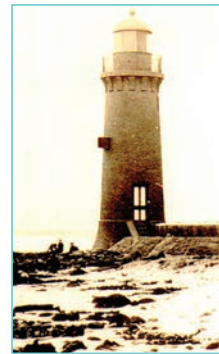
View down the stairs c. 2002

The Victorian Public Works Department designed the tower and the dual occupancy cottage with work completed in seven months, by contractors McKenzie and McCowan, for the sum of £2,988.

The basalt blocks came from the quarry to the west and each block for the tower is individually shaped, to interlock and incorporate the stair treads projecting from the wall.

The tower was 13 metres above sea level, painted red, and visible for nine miles (13 kms) seaward. It shows a flash for one second, an eclipse for two seconds, flash for one second then an eclipse of six seconds. The fenced cottage, with a garden, offered quarters for a Keeper and an Assistant.

Thomas Pearson was the first Assistant and the second Keeper, and he kept an interesting diary, noting onions, potatoes, cabbages and corn in his garden, a beehive, a pig, a horse, cattle, sheep, hens and geese, kangaroos, an emu and chicks. He rowed into town monthly for groceries and collected wood for heating. He recorded rabbits, snakes, native cats (quolls?) and shearwaters on the Island. A day's work began by climbing the 39 steps of the tower, refuelling the lamp (with colza (canola) oil), cleaning the lens and windows, winding the clockwork mechanism, and checking the light timing (which was unreliable). Pearson's boss, Harbour Master John Mills, eventually prevailed on Pearson to take the pledge (abstain from alcohol) after he "got sprung" for inattention to his duties on multiple occasions.



Lighthouse c. 1910

George Ford was the first Keeper, assisted by Pearson. Pearson's assistant was George Stevens, who lost his daughter to scarlet fever, despite daily visits from the doctor in Belfast (Port Fairy). Keepers were generally placed for five years or less (there were 14 Keepers between 1867 and 1913), with James Northey (1915-1929) and Hugh Haldane (1929-1952) providing the longest continuous service.

Hugh Haldane, the last Keeper to live with his family in the cottage, made many changes – painting the tower white, planting the Norfolk Island pines around the garden and along the river. He also supervised the port activity as Harbour Master.

His three sons built two fishing boats in the compound and remnants of the Shiny leaf (*Coprosma repens*) hedges and flowers remain. A false alarm in 1906, when the Keeper had sighted rockets and called out the lifeboat, led to a telephone being provided. The cottage had no electricity and occupants lived in similar conditions to the first Keeper, so the Haldane family built extra accommodation near the stone cottage.

The Haldane children went to the Consolidated School, travelling with their father in a motor-boat (termed "the Pest" because of difficulty in starting) to King George Square, and waited there after school to return. James Northey used to be collected in the Harbour's boat to take him into town.

West of the lighthouse station, there was a tall flagstaff (in three "lifts") which allowed flag signals (indicating the tide level for entrance into the Moyne) to be seen by steamers leaving Warrnambool, so the Captain could determine if the vessel could enter the river. The flagstaff was dismantled in 1952, and re-erected at Battery Hill, where it was originally located, but moved when the gun battery was built. That same year the Haldane family left Port Fairy for Port Lincoln, where they pioneered tuna fishing.



Hugh Haldane on board "The Pest" c. 1938.