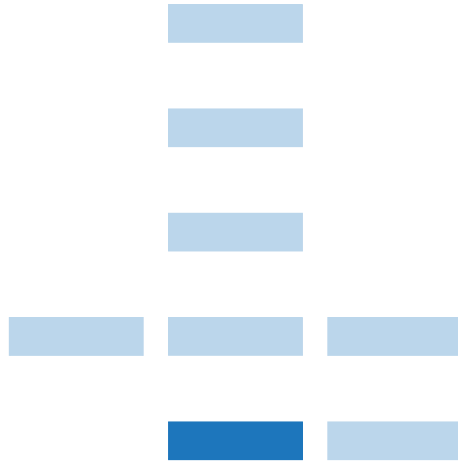




The Skerries - where HT Knott served his first appointment from 1875-86 and again as PK from 1897-1902. The station was one of the most important in the region as it assisted the great volume of shipping arriving into the port of Liverpool and the Mersey.



Henry T, Ellen & Sarah

Extracted from: *Light On The Forelands* by Ken & Clifford Trethewey, Jazz-Fusion Books (2022)

Late 19th Century

The fifth generation of Knott lighthouse keepers; The complex career patterns of keepers becomes more apparent; The stress of employment as a light keeper is highlighted in numerous ways with sad outcomes.

Appledore, Shipyards And Three Brothers Named Knott

After his appointment at the Eddystone, George Knott was given the Braunton¹ lighthouse to manage (see p184). Soon after arriving there in August 1866, George's eldest son, Henry Thomas, reached his 15th birthday, and it is unlikely that he ever went to school in Braunton. Instead, he crossed the water to Appledore on the other side of the Taw/Torridge estuary where he was apprenticed as a ship's carpenter in a local shipyard. There was a distinct difference between that trade and those of a shipwright and a boat-builder. All three were present among Appledore's population of 2,206 in 1871. A boat-builder would have been involved with small boats, like dinghies and cutters, whilst a shipwright would have been more concerned with the building of the hulls of much larger ships - ketches, brigs and schooners. A ship carpenter, on the other hand, was likely to have been employed on its interior furniture and fittings.

¹ Also known as the Bideford lighthouse. A detailed history is given in "Lighthouses of Cornwall and Devon."

So what shipyards were there in Appledore? One source² lists just three shipbuilders for 1878 and these are easily found in the 1871 census, but only two of them declared that they were 'shipbuilders.' Robert Cock (34) lived on 'The Quay' and recorded that he employed 28 men and 2 boys. Ship repair was the mainstay of his business which had been founded in the mid-1850s, although he did occasionally build a new vessel,³ so perhaps it is here that we should look for Henry Knott. Robert Cock's competitor was Alfred Cook, also 34. He lived among Appledore's maritime middle-class on Marine Parade, an address that overlooked Appledore's unique and indispensable facility, the Richmond Dry Dock. Cook owned a larger business that employed 53 men and 7 boys. Also on Marine Parade lived the third 'shipbuilder' who did not admit to that profession or to employing any men, but William Pickard was important to the local community as a ship owner.⁴

Veering away to the south from the head of the dock was New Quay which comprised nineteen dwellings including the *The Ship*- at its lower end

² *The New Maritime History of Devon* vol. 2 ch. 7 p86.

³ *The New Maritime History of Devon* vol. 2 ch. 7 p84.

⁴ 1871 Census, RG10/2203 – Folio 30 p30; Folio 29 p27-8.



ABOVE: An old postcard showing - on the far side of the river - the north Devon village of Appledore, famous for its shipbuilding industry that continues to this day.

- and *The Bell*, both public houses. About halfway along and next to Joannah Arnold's shop lived a sailor's wife called Ann Harding with her three young boys, the youngest being only 10 months old. Her husband was away at sea yet she had a spare room for two lodgers - Henry Thomas Knott and his younger brother George. In the next house to them was Captain William Western whose wife Elizabeth had two young daughters. However, their family enjoyed the luxury of a live-in servant girl, Jane Ford, who was only 13 years old. This terrace of cottages looked out over the shipyard that served the dock, and its deserted remains - including two slips - can still be seen today.

There were five ship carpenters on the quay, and, scrolling randomly through the 85 pages that made up the census for Appledore, it can be seen that this was the majority trade. Shipwrights were very scarce. It is also noticeable that the word 'apprentice' rarely appears and therefore its unclear whether or not Henry - now 20 - had finished his apprenticeship. It was the same for brother George. At 16 years old, he was described as a 'sailmaker,' and further along the quay lived Arthur Mitchell, also a 'sailmaker' in spite of being only 15 years old. These young men must have been apprenticed to a master, but who might that have been?

Ishla Street and Bude Street were probably Appledore's most populous streets, and although I have not searched every page, two sailmakers were found in Bude Street. Sam Mathews was a Greenwich Pensioner, so he had learnt his trade in the tough school of the Royal Navy. He employed three boys, whilst a neighbour, John Popham, was a 'sailmaker and ship owner' though not admitting to being an employer. John Fishwick was 68 and owned a ship chandler's shop on The Quay that was run by his unmarried daughter Ellen. However, somewhere he had a loft in which two men and two boys were employed.⁵

In any writing about Appledore the name William Yeo dominates. He was the eldest son of James Yeo who had become a powerful influence in the Colonial Government of Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland. He had almost total control over the timber and shipbuilding on the island, and, during the drive for ever more expansion and profit, he sent his son William back to Appledore as his Agent. Between them they built up an impressive international business. In due course William Yeo built Appledore's Richmond Dry Dock, opened in 1856, and gradually acquired control of most of the

⁵ 1871 Census RG10/2203 – Folio 36 p3; Folio 35 p1 and Folio 30 p31 respectively.

local ship building capacity.

Father and son then evolved a most unusual practice by building cheap, unfinished ships on Prince Edward Island. These were sailed across the North Atlantic to Appledore, often with incomplete deck houses, fittings, and even limited rigging without top-masts and yards. The ships were then completed in the Richmond Dry Dock and either sold immediately or following a few passages under Yeo's ownership when the tonnage prices were high. It was no surprise, therefore, in the census of 1871 to find him at Richmond House, a large mansion intended to overshadow those of the local gentry. Here William Yeo refers to himself as a 'merchant and landowner.' Although William died prematurely in 1872, just four years after his father James, the family's activities were spread over 60 years from 1833 to 1893, and during that time 350 ships passed through their hands with more than 250 being sold to British owners soon after their arrival in North Devon. In 1865, the year that the Knotts arrived in Braunton, no less than 18 of these ships were sold - three times the normal average.

1872 was also the year in which George and Catherine's third son, Arthur, celebrated his 15th birthday by joining his brothers in Appledore to learn the trade of a shipwright. Thus, whilst Arthur was just beginning an apprenticeship, Henry was completing his time and wondering what he should do next. There was no shortage of work on the scores of ships that came through Appledore, but gradually Henry began to realise that he was drawn to the Trinity House Service to be a light keeper like his father and grandfather before him.

Nine years had passed since the family's 1866 arrival in Braunton, but it has been suggested in the family that it was 1875 when Henry found lodgings in Holyhead for his first appointment as an Assistant Light Keeper at the Skerries off the coast of Anglesey.⁶

Induction into Trinity House

On completion of his apprenticeship, it would have been comparatively easy for Henry (or, more likely, his father George) to have a word with the District Superintendent responsible for the Bideford Bar Light. Curiously, the light was a part of the South Wales district based in Neyland in Pembrokeshire, on the other side of the Bristol Channel. Visits from the Superintendent would have been occasional; a letter would have been sent,



ABOVE: The Trinity House buoy wharf is the site on the River Thames at Blackwall where all initial training of lighthouse keepers took place. No longer part of the Trinity House estate, the site is today a community centre for the Arts.

and all this took time.

One lighthouse keeper later described the process of joining up just after World War I.

*"Trinity House, London, controls all important lighthouses around the coasts of England and Wales so I applied to them. I was accepted after an educational and medical examination, although at the time the competition was severe. I received training in signalling, Morse, semaphore, knots and splices, as well as general boat work, metal work, carpentry, steam and early types of oil engines. This training was carried out at their Blackwall Workshops on the Thames. We learned about all the various lighthouses equipped with the more modern types of engines, lamps and fog signals, for example, and also coping with isolated rock lights which posed a severe physical and mental test. After six years (sic) training I eventually attained the required certificates in the various types of engines, charging plants, wireless equipment, Post Office R/T and others."*⁷

Clearly the training must have expanded since Henry's time, and the six years referred to is misleading. His time would not all have been spent

⁶ Roberts E. G.: p25.

⁷ Nethercott, Alec: "Forty Years on Lighthouses", Torpoint Archives and Heritage Centre.

at Blackwall but would have included all of his time to become “fully qualified.” Six months at Blackwall would seem to be more than adequate. The Trinity Buoy Wharf in Poplar boasts an unpretentious training lighthouse (see p257) beside the Thames and it is here that every new, aspiring light keeper was taught everything he needed to know, but exactly how long it took has never been stated. I would estimate that it was less than three months and this short duration made it difficult to leave any form of record, but family stories handed down suggest that Henry’s induction was in 1875 and on that timescale Henry would have been ready for his first appointment before the year was out.

Holyhead and the Skerries Light

It was usual for the first appointment for a new keeper, especially a young bachelor, to be a rock lighthouse. A draft to the Skerries, however, was a little unusual as most of the rock lighthouses were in southwest England and southwest Wales. In these situations a lodging in the nearest town (Holyhead, in this case) was essential and another reason that bachelors were suited to these circumstances.

There had been a light on the Skerries since 1717, almost as long as the lights at South Foreland, but it was not a reef or a rock in the accepted understanding of the term. This was a group of rocks about 800 m in length and 175 m across at the widest point. It was large enough to be considered an island with significant recreational area, but was nevertheless a considerable hazard to shipping as it was situated on the northwest corner of Anglesey, two miles from the nearest landfall and directly in the path of any shipping heading for Liverpool and the Mersey. The Mersey Docks & Harbour Board owned a number of lights in the vicinity, but not Skerries. Likewise, Lloyds Shipping Insurance owned several signal stations on the approaches to Liverpool, but not on the Skerries.

Fortunately, a contemporary word sketch of the station has survived. It reads:

“Having spent a few weeks solitary confinement on one of the Skerries’ islands, I thought your readers might be interested in a brief sketch of those lonely islands. The light is termed by Trinity House as a fixed light making a very agreeable contrast to the rapidly revolving red light of the [Holyhead] breakwater and the more slowly moving white light of the South Stack, looming in the distance. Many a homeward bound mariner’s heart leaps for joy when surrounded by the midnight gloom, as he

espies the Skerries light which tells him that very soon he will reach his home port and the bosom of his family and friends.

“The light keepers are four in number, three are constantly on the Skerries and one on shore and thus they achieve, alternately, two weeks recess out of eight weeks. Mr. Hall, the Principal [Keeper] is a gentleman who seems to have lived the allotted time of man and is on the eve of his superannuation. In former days, when the Skerries was a land station where families lived, it was his misfortune to be there eighteen months without putting his feet on terra firma. The others, Messrs. Knott, Pinder and Gaylard, are comparatively young men, two of whom have recently entered a state of matrimony. Any visitors will find the keepers social, kind and ready to do anything that will be conducive to their comfort.

“Most people who have only seen the Skerries from a distance, imagine there is only one island, but there are four, three of which are only accessible at low water. Rabbits are very numerous on the islands, especially during the summer months. In winter their burrows become swamped and they are compelled to take to the rocks were they perish in vast numbers from cold, wet and hunger. Strange to say, rats and mice have not made the islands their home, but fish are caught at times in large numbers. The keepers, however, find little time for fishing after keeping their cottages in order, preparing food, attending to the light and the fog engine. Birds of passage are frequently attracted to the light on a dark night and recently as many as one hundred and fifty were captured within a few hours. Many of them strike the lantern with such force that they fall to the ground never to rise again.

Within the last two years, a fog engine has been erected on one of the other islands which when in full play can be heard several miles away. A casual visitor would never rest, but the keepers seem to sleep through it all as if it was quiet.

A fortnightly visit is made by the pretty little steamer Stella under the command of Captain W.S. Pascoe the District Superintendent bringing news from the shore and newspapers are eagerly exchanged. The quiet reserve that seemed to have settled on everyone disappears and the monotony of the island is broken for a day or two. It is the opinion of many that the Skerries is the best rock station around our coasts as the keepers can move about here. In most other cases, Eddystone for example, the keepers



ABOVE: The Skerries is a group of small islands off the northeast tip of Anglesey. For a time in the mid-19th century keepers lived here with their families, until they were moved ashore to Holyhead and the light was designated as a rock station.

*are captive within their tower from the moment they arrive to the moment they land on shore. Who would be a light keeper on a rock station? Not I. Yet the Trinity Board does not require our services. They have more applications than they have vacancies. Only influence and friends could get you a position.*⁸

The reference to the light in the days when families lived on the island is a rare insight into an era that was all but over. The census for the Skerries of 1861 is inevitably ‘lost,’ but 1851 does show three families living on the lighthouse with a fourth residence that was empty. I can only assume that John Hall’s residence there was sometime after 1851 when his family was complete and their places of birth are known. However, it was sobering to see three baptisms in Holyhead from 1882 to 1884 for John Lakey Ellis and his wife Margaret who were still recording South Stack Lighthouse as their address.

⁸ ‘Rambler’: *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald*, 26th October 1878.

Families On The Skerries

John and Elizabeth Hall

John Hall, the Principal Keeper at the Skerries, had a house in Holyhead at 56 Newry Street,⁹ but for a man at the end of his career it was very unusual to find such an elderly Principal Keeper on such a wild station and this was noticed by ‘Rambler’ during his visit. John Hall had been baptised in Dale, Pembrokeshire on the 10th February 1811 and the register notes that his father John was ‘drowned.’ He married Elizabeth Wyles in St. Andrew’s, Holborn in 1831, whilst it appears he was working on a lightship. They had a daughter, Elizabeth Emma, in London in the following year, but they were back at Dale, Pembrokeshire for the birth of their next child in 1840. They remained at the lighthouse at St. Ann’s Head until sometime after 1851, but the next twenty years are uncertain until 1871 when they were found

⁹ 1881 Census, RG11/5594 Folio 36 p5.



ABOVE: Henry Thomas Knott with his first wife, Ellen Margaret Hall. Ellen too came from a long line of serving light keepers and brought with her the relationship with the Darling family.

at Whitby North, sometimes known as Hawsker light. It was during this decade of the 1870s that our story is set and Cousin Betty tells the story in a romantic vein.

If the Principal was on shore (and he had his turn like all the others), the assistant keeper coming ashore at the end of his period of duty would take a note around to his house in Newry Street to update him of the activity on the light. If the assistant was coming ashore leaving the Principal on the light, then a letter from the Principal would be taken to his wife. Each time that Henry carried that note to Newry Street he met Ellen Margaret Hall and, with a little encouragement, they became engaged. This match has something of a scheme behind it as Ellen was already 30 (in 1877) and in the eyes of many parents, should have 'settled down.' What better match than a light keeper who had been 'assessed' by his 'superior' as a suitable husband?

Henry and Ellen were married in the chapel

of St. Seiriol in the parish of Holyhead on the 4th December 1877.¹⁰ A marriage ceremony in those days was an unpretentious affair, often with few people there to witness it - and certainly with no photographs. The two signatures on the page representing formal witnesses were often simply bystanders or church officials, but it is always worth a cursory look at them. At face value there was nothing significant in the names William Brown and Ellen Roberts. Roberts for one was a very common surname in this corner of North Wales, but surprisingly Brown wasn't, so I tried the 1881 census with no preconceived expectations.

William Brown (27) was living at 7 Cybi Place (the name of the parish church), but it was not his house. The head of the house was Mary Gould, a widow from Newport in Monmouthshire. It was a name I recognised. William Brown was her son-in-law, and his wife Sarah Flora Brown (27) had been born Sarah Gould at St. Bees, a location in Cumberland that had a lighthouse. The connection was clear.

George and Mary Gould were at St. Bees lighthouse for both 1851 and 1861 censuses, and Sarah Flora had been born there in 1854. At the next census in 1871 he was at the South Stack as its Principal Keeper, and his family was living with him at the light. Sadly, on the 29th January 1873 he was buried from Hibernia Terrace, Holyhead aged 59. Mary Gould was now a widow with Sarah just 19 years old. However, it began to look as if there was a friendship between the Halls and the Goulds, but could it be proved?

Sarah Gould and William Henry Brown had married in the same chapel on Monday 3rd September 1877 just three months before Henry Knott and Ellen Hall, but I was looking for a witness to the ceremony that was to make the connection. It wasn't the one I was anticipating, but it proved the point. The two families were indeed connected, and the witness was Elizabeth Emma Greenhough, Ellen Hall's sister.

It was a great pity that the marriage certificate simply recorded Holyhead as the address of the newly wedded Browns, but the houses in Cybi Place (now probably St. Cybi Street) are identical to Newry Street and just at the bottom of the road. There must have been more than one gathering in the sacred front rooms of those two houses in 1877 with ample supplies of tea and cakes for anyone who chose to call.

Almost exactly a year after the wedding of Henry

¹⁰ Roberts states 2nd December. The Marriage Register is indistinct but the preceding marriage was the 4th December.

and Ellen, their first child was born on the 1st December 1878. On the 5th February 1879 she was baptised in the parish church, Catherine Goldsack Knott, after her paternal grandmother. She would eventually become mother to 'Cousin Betty' Roberts.

Growing up among the Knott Family and hearing all the tales about lighthouses and the part our family played in their operation, I can recall that Henry Thomas Knott was seen as something of an enigma. There seemed to be little contact with anyone among his descendants, probably due to his premature death in 1910. However, one descendent did appear out of nowhere just as I was beginning to learn the nuances of family history in the late 1970s. Cousin Betty, as we came to know her, had embarked upon a family history of her own and she wanted to record all the family involvements with lighthouses. Her book *They All Lived in Lighthouses* is a wealth of detail. She grew up immersed in the stories of lighthouses in the care of the Hall and Knott Families, so it is appropriate that we should learn a little about her.

Hilda Elizabeth Grace Ballyn¹¹ was baptised to William Ballyn and Catherine Goldsack Ballyn (née Knott) on the 10th July 1901 at St. Seiriol's Church in Holyhead. She was the first grandchild of Henry Thomas Knott as Catherine was his first child born in 1878, but his marriage in that same church on the 4th December 1877 would link our family to the most famous lighthouse story every recorded – that of Grace Darling and rescue at the Longstone in the Farne Islands.

At this point I have to insert a word of explanation concerning the two churches in Victorian Holyhead. Confusion has arisen as there seem to be only one set of registers. The parish church of St. Cybi was close to the harbour, but unusually St. Seiriol's was only a short walk away. It was consecrated in 1853 and was known as a chapel to St. Cybi so it wasn't a parish in its own right. Unlike St. Cybi, St. Seiriol's had a typically Gothic appearance with a tall spire used by all mariners as a day mark.¹² Both churches had their own cemeteries, yet only one set of records has been digitized, and it is these in which all our family records appear. As a consequence I will always refer to the 'parish church.'

After their marriage Henry and Ellen had no thought of seeking a house of their own, and they shared Newry Street with Ellen's parents. Her elder

sister, Elizabeth Greenhough, lived next door at No. 58 with her husband Ellis, an engineer on the Irish ferries of the London & North Western Railway. It would appear that John Hall had retired by now (he was 67 in 1878) and he was suffering ill-health. Henry, in the meantime, was busy putting his carpentry skills to work and made a glass fronted cupboard with drawers beneath it for Ellen to use for baby Catherine's clothes. A century later in the 1980s Betty still proudly used this cabinet as a bookcase.

'Rambler' stated that two of the keepers he named were newly married and one of those was Henry Knott. The other 'newly-wed' was William Charles Gaylard, married on the 8th March 1877 in Plymouth where he had been born in 1853. His father was the Verger of Charles Church and when his next brother James was baptised in 1855 his father was the Sexton. But, at William's marriage to Elizabeth Johanna Muchamore in March 1877, his father was a Bank Messenger. So, there was no maritime tradition in the family. Having said that, his brother James also joined Trinity House and had the rare honour of extinguishing the lamps in Smeaton's Eddystone tower, and then lighting the lamps in the new Douglass tower in February 1882.

Following Gaylard's marriage to Elizabeth, no time was wasted before a daughter was born in Plymouth in December 1877, and there is no facility to learn if they travelled to Holyhead as a family in the New Year. It was all very new to them, and it would be unsurprising if Elizabeth had remained in Plymouth with her new baby until William's time on the Skerries was completed. The 1881 census should have revealed what happened next, but it didn't. They could not be found. In these circumstances I always think of Europa Point in Gibraltar, and that is exactly where they were. Two boys were born there in 1880 and 1882, but that is as close as it is possible to get to their date of birth.

William Gaylard's career in Trinity House service can be tracked all the way to his retirement and superannuation. The same cannot be said for Mr. Pinder. In my extraction of light keepers' names from the eight available censuses, there is not a single occurrence of the name of Pinder. A random analysis of births for 1878 in the General Registrar's Index reveals 148 registrations, with a distinct leaning towards Yorkshire for their home territory. 'Rambler' does not even give the benefit of a forename to assist with his identification. All that can be said is that Pinder was on the Skerries at the same time as Henry Knott in October 1878. Now you

¹¹ Elizabeth preferred to be known as Betty and often dropped the name of Hilda, as she did with the authorship of her book.

¹² The church was found to be unsafe in 1980 and finally demolished in 1992.



ABOVE: The Skerries in 2014 showing the significant amount of space on the top of the group of rocks.

see him – now you don't.

It was during 1879 that the Skerries was in need of a new Principal Keeper as John Hall stood down from the responsibility and took his pension. In normal circumstances the 1881 census would have revealed who that new man was, but this particular return is bizarre. For once it had not been lost. The lighthouse had been added to the last sheet of District 15 – Llanfair. Whoever filled it in knew there were three keepers on the light, but didn't know their names. Instead he wrote 'NK' three times and to each he added an age - 40, 30, 20, but he thought they were all unmarried. Was this a complete guess? Henry Knott was actually 30 years old, and he was on the light for he was not at home with Ellen, but who were the other two keepers? We must go looking in the town for any signs of a family without a man and a keeper ashore on leave might be discovered.

The 1881 census was an impossible task. It returned over 11,000 names for the area and 4,000 names for the town. That is 200 pages of scrawled handwriting - a daunting prospect to any genealogist. I dabbled and tried a few tricks, but nothing was found, so I tried a different tack. A

young keeper might bring a young wife and that might mean babies in need of a baptism. Access to the Parish Register was open, so I dived in beginning in 1879. It was 1885 before I had my 'eureka' moment and the one new light keeper was James Walter Smith and his wife Laura. I will come back to them in their turn.

A Slide Into Depression

The 1880s began well enough in Newry Street although John Hall was seriously unwell and giving cause for concern. By February Ellen knew that she was expecting her second child and that raised its own concerns as Ellen had always been considered 'delicate.' This quaint terminology is unheard today, but it was common in my boyhood in the 1950s and this perceived condition may have given rise to the young female 'servant' who always seemed to be a part of the Hall household. In 1879 John Hall had been staying away from home, and he wrote to his daughter Ellen in which he said:

"I can't say I have benefited much by the change but mother is very 'jolly.' She wishes you to put Mary to sleep in our bed for a few nights before our return."

In 1879 the young servant was Elizabeth Fagan (14) and she had a sister Mary who was 12. It seems likely that she was the Mary to whom he referred. She was to air the bed and drive out the damp before John and his wife returned to sleep in it.

My reader might be surprised to learn that servants could be found in the homes of light keepers, who were not considered to be well paid, but they were well looked after by Trinity House, and it was a job often pursued out of the public gaze at a remote location. It was not unusual to find a young girl in the household as domestic help, but it became a little more contentious when there was an older, female housekeeper as we shall see.

Ellen's second child was a son baptised John Hall Knott in the parish church on Monday 15th August 1881. It was an unusual choice of day, which may have had a bearing on Henry's time ashore, but it was a different matter for a funeral. He would be expected to be there for that. John Hall's funeral took place on Wednesday 19th October 1881 and it was a short walk to the churchyard from Newry Street.

Three years were to pass in relative tranquility before there was almost an exact repeat of the events of 1881. Ellen gave birth to a daughter in July 1884 and on Wednesday 6th August Hilda Marion was carried down to the parish church for her baptism. It was the last one that her grandmother would witness. Elizabeth Hall died at the beginning of December triggering yet another mournful procession down to the parish churchyard on Monday 8th December 1884. She was 74 years old and Christmas would be a restrained affair that year.

On Saturday 5th December 1885, the family had to do it all over again as another funeral procession left Newry Street and wound its way slowly to the churchyard. This time it was not No. 56 Newry Street at the start of the procession, but No.58: Ellis Greenhough had died unexpectedly aged 54 years. Ellen's sister, Elizabeth Greenhough, was devastated as the Rev. Robert Price worked his way steadily through the burial service until Ellis's coffin was slowly lowered into its final resting place, very possibly by colleagues in the LNW&R ferry service.

These unfortunate events were a part of Henry's family life. They affected his wife and even the house in which they lived. The tragedy that afflicted his sister-in-law came at a time when his wife was expecting once again. We don't know if Henry and Ellen knew in that fateful December that she was expecting twins, but that is what she delivered on Tuesday 12th January 1886. Cousin Betty continues

the story like this:

"The family was not without help for her [Ellen's] sister Elizabeth had no children and was only too ready to help. They also had a maid living with the family, so all should have been well. However, at the end of January the weekly charwoman failed to turn up to do the family washing and Ellen insisted on getting up to assist with the work. As a result she caught a cold which developed into pneumonia and she died at the end of January."¹³

Reverend Price was on hand once again to perform a baptismal service on Thursday 28th January 1886 in which he named the two girls Violet Margretta, and Helen Mabel, who became known as May. Two days later, on Saturday 30th January, Ellen died at home in 56 Newry Street. A ship's surgeon certified her death as pleurisy and on Tuesday 2nd February, Henry walked to the registrar's office to register her passing. It was all over in a week as she was buried in the parish churchyard on Thursday 4th February 1886.

The loss of his beloved wife, shattered Henry Knott's mental stability and he began to neglect his duty as a light keeper. It was said that he sometimes asked a colleague to do his duty for him in order to look after his five children, but that was not fair on anyone. His sister-in-law Elizabeth Greenhough offered - even begged him to leave the children in her care, but he was having none of that. Within a very short time he was compelled to leave Holyhead as there was nothing left for him in that town.

There is no doubt that the 18 months that had passed between July 1884 and February 1886 would have tested the resolve of many people and it is a great pity that it is not possible to name all of the keepers who formed the crew of the Skerries light alongside Henry Knott in 1886. They were the ones who experienced Henry's grief-driven confusion and ill-temper, but one of them can be named as James Walter Smith and his wife Laura.

The Man In The Middle

James and Laura Smith

Henry's colleague on Skerries, James Smith, had been born at Seahouses on the Northumberland coast in 1857 and was six years younger than Henry. It was 1881 when, at the age of 24, he served on the Smalls rock lighthouse off the southwest coast of Wales. This was his induction

¹³ Roberts, p28.

into the service, but it was followed in 1883 by a marriage that suggests that he had returned home to Northumberland to one of the lights on the Farne Islands. His wife was Laura Jane Cutting, daughter of Thomas Henry Cutting, Principal Keeper of the Inner Farne Light. It was a totally different experience to find themselves in Anglesey as James Smith took his next position on the Skerries. Laura would have to live in Holyhead, but the Superintendent was used to dealing with keepers and their families in need of lodgings. They had no children when they arrived, but Laura must have been expectant for a son was born at the beginning of August 1885. He was named after his grandfather, Thomas Henry, on the 20th August, but the event revealed that they were tenants of Cambria Terrace (now Cambria Street). Nowhere is far from anywhere in Holyhead and this terrace bordered the east side of the cemetery in which St. Seiriol's chapel stood. The street looked much the same as all the others except that the houses on one side boasted a shallow bay window to the 'posh' front room. So, here they were, just as Henry Knott was about to be catapulted into the worst phase of his life.

The Mistake That Led To Mucking

As 1886 drifted towards 1887 there was very little that was rational about Henry Knott. He wanted to leave Holyhead, yet he needed someone to look after the children. Catherine and John were growing away now at 8 and 6, but Hilda was still only 3 and the twins were just a few months old. Violet had now been passed the label 'delicate' from her poor, late mother and this would follow her all through her life. Cousin Betty recorded the vivid memory retained by her mother, Catherine, as she watched the removal men carrying out the furniture from Newry Street. Even the rocking horse, lovingly made by her father, had to go.

Henry, widowed and alone, had adamantly refused help willingly offered by Elizabeth Greenhough. It was the obvious and easiest solution, but it was not for Henry. He was obsessed with leaving Holyhead and he is alleged to have approached Trinity House for another appointment, but it could not be any light at random. He had decided in his unbalanced mind that it must be the Mucking Light on the Thames because his sister Mary Jane (Polly) Knott was living close by in East London.

It is easy to become drawn in to the drama of this situation created by Cousin Betty, but a sense

of proportion is also needed. It was very unusual for a keeper, especially an inexperienced keeper, to remain on a rock light for as long as Henry had served on the Skerries. In 1886 he had been there at least 11 years and there must have been a reason for Trinity House to allow that situation to exist. Perhaps it was in deference to the loyalty of John Hall as his case had also been exceptional. Yet that cannot be the reason: John Hall had been dead for five years by the time that 1886 had dawned on Henry's tragedy.

Any man unexpectedly faced by the death of his wife leaving behind five children under the age of eight - including twin babies - could have been driven to despair. Today his course of action in moving from Holyhead to London might seem heroic, even if it was misguided, but imagine Victorian England in 1887 when faced with such a railway journey. My family did such a journey in wartime 1940s when we slept on stations and in carriages. We travelled again at the height of British Railways in the 1980s when we could roll into Holyhead on the same train in the same afternoon, some five hours after leaving Euston. Henry travelled from Holyhead to Crewe and onwards to Euston in small, wooden, third-class carriages without any corridor, with five children, and no help. Imagine changing trains, as he might have done at Chester. Think of his journey across London to somewhere in 'East London' by growler,¹⁴ without knowing what he would find at the end of the journey. Was that possible in a day? I think not. Then where did they stay? And no-one has even mentioned feeding the babies and changing their nappies - if there was such a thing in Victorian times.

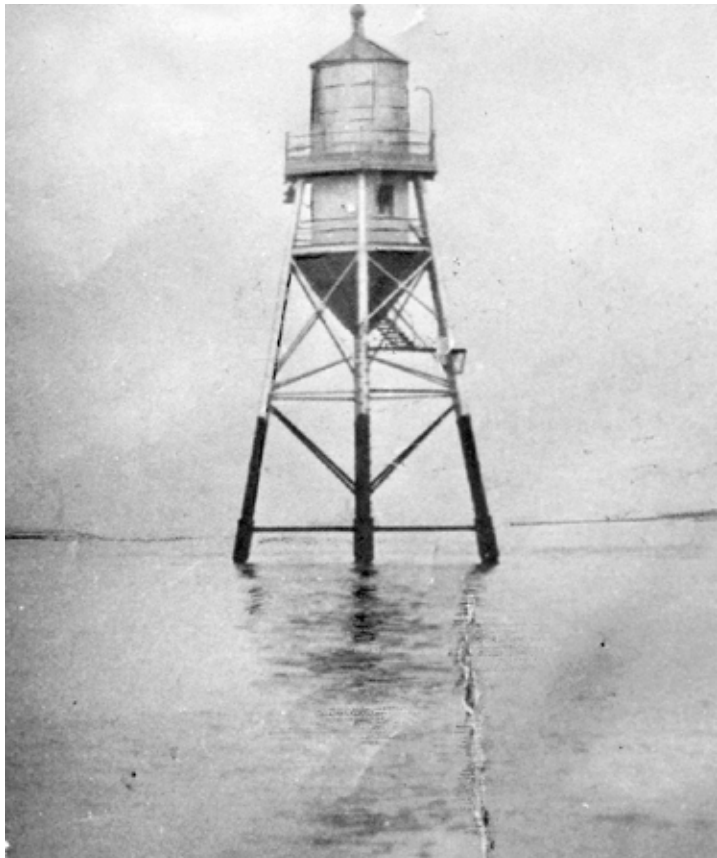
This journey beggars belief, but his destination is unknown. Where did Polly live? 'East London' is the way it was told in Cousin Betty's family folklore, and Essex could easily have been East London in the minds of those who retold the story. Did Henry realise that she was in domestic service and her house was not her own? He would have been an embarrassment if he had turned up unannounced, and he might have been the cause of Polly's notorious bad-tempered outbursts. She may have been the cook in someone's household, and if that is correct then she would have had little free time. Henry made a grave mistake in thinking that Polly was at home with nothing to occupy her time.

There is also the problem that, being unmarried, Polly does not leave any documentary footprint.

¹⁴ A small one-horse utility carriage used in London as a basic cab, its name taken from the noise it made on the cobblestones.



ABOVE: This old postcard perfectly illustrates a visit at the end of the 19th century to one of the pile lighthouses in the Thames of which the Mucking BELOW was one.



She has not been recorded since 1881 when she was 17 and working as a general servant in a small private school for girls in Wrafton Lane, Braunton. In 1887 she was 23. She must have had employment, and that would have meant living in an established household. How was it, that Henry thought she would be able to look after his five children? Was he not thinking straight? It would seem so.

The result of this bad decision, as told by Cousin Betty, has all the hallmarks of a very brief interlude. As a child, Betty's mother, Catherine, remembered being frightened by this bad-tempered woman, but added nothing to it by way of other recollections. A search for lodgings was inevitable as he could not stay with Polly, and those lodgings had to be reasonably close to his new appointment on the Mucking light. How did he find a couple whose circumstances allowed them to take on five unknown children?

Young Catherine Knott remembered that the couple found by her father, were very kind to them, but they could do nothing about their threadbare clothes. This couple is the missing link. If only we knew who they were and where they lived? This very peculiar situation was entirely due to Henry's inability to hire a housekeeper to live in the Trinity Cottages at Stanford le Hope, but the magnitude of his difficulty, I believe, has been grossly understated.

His presence on the Mucking light, as a part of this story, cannot be proved, but it will be taken seriously. It was one of a group of lights known as the Thames River Lights with names like Gunfleet, Maplin and Chapman. It was, like the others such as Dovercourt, a screw pile light, elevated on legs with a single room beneath a lantern. It had a dinghy slung in davits which enabled the keepers to reach the shore at Stanford le Hope, a small community where Trinity House had built a pair of cottages for the families of the two keepers in charge. Unusual as they were, these were not lights that attracted very much attention among light keepers. Only two were required for Mucking – a Principal and an Assistant Keeper and their watch system of four hours on and four off was done on this light, as it would be done on a rock light. However, as they were close to the shore, a third man was unnecessary.

It was an unusual location on the north bank of the Thames, indented by scores of creeks and surrounded by mudflats beloved by the readers of the Dickens novel *Great Expectations*, but no stretch of the imagination could align this location with East London. Yet, in 1887 it was linked to Stratford and Fenchurch Street Station, 27 miles away, by the



London Tilbury & Southend Railway.

Two years on the light meant that many keepers went unrecorded and Henry was one of those. In 1891 the Assistant Keeper was Henry William Smith who was born at the Europa Point light on Gibraltar in 1857, but his record shows the birth of Emily Annie at the Stanford Trinity Cottages at the end of 1890. He had come from the Lizard light sometime after July 1887 when his daughter, Elsie Jane, was baptised in Cornwall, so a move within those three critical years is as close as we can get to Henry Knott's presence. How he managed is little short of a miracle. It might have been a bad decision, but a man in his circumstances cannot be expected to act rationally. Within the year, common sense prevailed. He needed to go back to Trinity House with cap in hand and tail between his legs.

A Passage To India

It was also with cap in hand that he went back to Holyhead and to Elizabeth Greenhough after twelve months of difficulty and disillusionment, whilst he tried to make amends to the Appointments Office at Trinity House. It has been said that they had been unimpressed by his recent behaviour and had chosen a particularly difficult light for him, but it was neither in England nor Wales. It was at the edge of the Empire just slightly south of west from Cape Comorin, the southernmost tip of India, and it was known as Minicoy.

The date of his appointment is not known accurately, but must have been in 1888, three years after the light was lit by its designer Sir James Douglass, on the 2nd February 1885. When Henry arrived as its Principal Keeper it is possible that few Principals had climbed the tower before him. It was something the like of which he had never seen in all his wildest dreams. It was a posting to die for - and he very nearly did.

It would appear that Henry's appointment to the Minicoy Island lighthouse was a temporary promotion to Principal Keeper, but his subsequent appointment reverted his rank. However, in



LEFT ABOVE: A photo of Henry Thomas Knott in a uniform different from his Trinity House attire. It is possible it was that of the Imperial Lighthouse Service.

LEFT BELOW: The lighthouse at Minicoy in the Lakshadweep Islands of the Maldives group. Built to the designs of Sir James Douglass in 1885, it was a foreign appointment in 1888 for HT Knott working for the Imperial Lighthouse Service.

Britannia's Empire it was unthinkable that the British were not in charge of the lighthouse and it could be said that the Imperial Lighthouse Service was following its normal practice.

Minicoy is a coral atoll, one of a group of 35 islands covering 30,000 square miles in the Arabian Sea, only 10 of which are inhabited. Their ubiquitous crescent shapes are all the same with their lagoons on the west side. They are the tops of a huge underwater mountain range that begins at the Maldives to the south and extends about six hundred miles to the Laccadive Islands in the north. Minicoy Island is the southernmost island of the Lakshadweep group overlooking the 8 Degree Channel between it and the Maldives. It is 200 miles southwest of its mainland port of Kozhikode (now simply Kochi). The island's horseshoe of land is just 3 miles long and only a few hundred yards wide and like all the others it barely rises 6 feet (2 m) above sea level. But being close to the equator there is little in the way of tides to worry about. The lagoon it encloses is almost 12 square miles (31 km²) in area and is the largest in the island group, but it never exceeds a depth of 15 feet (4.6 m). Cyclones rarely touch the islands, but their associated winds and rains are not to be ignored and temperatures through the year stay in the range of 21 C to 32 C.

In Henry's time there was a surprisingly large population on the island with ten villages, and the nearest one to the lighthouse was Bada. Today the island is inevitably a holiday destination, but in the late 1880s it was wild and untouched.

When the Suez Canal opened in 1862 these islands found themselves on the direct route from Aden to Colombo on the southern tip of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) which was over 6,700 miles (10,800 km) from London. The shipping route - sometimes referred to as 'the lifeline of the Empire' - was then, and still is, the busiest shipping channel in the world and passes a little to the south of Minicoy Island. In the days of sail too many valuable cargoes were lost in this region, much to the chagrin of the ship owners. This was of great concern to the Board of Trade who also ran a small department known as the Imperial Lighthouse Service that replicated the work of Trinity House beyond the latter's jurisdiction. Little has been written about this largely forgotten institution,¹⁵ but they were ultimately responsible for eleven lighthouses - mostly in the Caribbean - and, although local labour was used in the lights, the

ILS often looked to Trinity House for the supply of experienced light keepers to supervise.

Minicoy lighthouse came from the drawing board of Sir William Douglass, but the decision to build one on the atoll was that of Lord Ripon, the Governor General of India. With the decision being made and the site selected in 1882, work started in May 1883 with the foundation stone being laid by the daughter of the Amin (Head man). It was to be a brick tower using black bricks from Birmingham, shipped from London, and the tower was completed by the Tamil builders in March 1884. In the Pembrokeshire Archive there is a diary of a mason named William Griffiths dated 1882-84. In it he describes his journey to the atoll and his experiences with the light's construction.¹⁶

When it was finished, the tower was 154 feet (47 m) high, to which was added its lantern fitted with a Chance Bros first order optic with kerosene wick lamps (identical to paraffin), which had an astonishing range of 40 miles (64 km) seen from a 360° visibility. The tower was given a coat of white paint and the roof of the lantern was painted red.

The lamp was lit on the 2nd February 1885 by the Amin of Minicoy in the presence of Sir James Douglass, who had been knighted just three years before in recognition of his achievement on the Eddystone reef. Inside the tower there was a prefabricated iron spiral staircase through the centre of the tower which was divided by five floors. The first floor contained 28 tanks each of 132 gallons. Then came the bedroom with two bunks and above that there was a kitchen and a living room. It was not unlike Smeaton's tower, but set in unfamiliar surroundings.¹⁷

Five lines in a publication entitled *The Colonies and India* recorded that Sir James Douglass had arrived in Colombo by P&O steamer. He had never been in the East before and was enjoying all that he saw.¹⁸ Henry Thomas Knott would arrive from Southampton in exactly the same way, but not in the same class.

Family sources suggest that when Henry arrived he found two native keepers on the light who were very good at their duties, but another source states that the light was maintained from Colombo with a visit every six months to change the keepers and replenish the kerosene oil and other stores. Henry needed to acclimatise to a very different diet as the keepers would be buying supplies from the local market, whilst the atoll was

15 For a summary, see Toby Chance and Peter Williams: "Lighthouses - The Race To Illuminate the World", New Holland Publishers (2008).

16 Pembrokeshire Archives Ref HDX/5.

17 *The Lighthouse Digest*.

18 *The Colonies & India*, 6 March 1885.

awash with fish, crabs and lobster and covered in coconut trees. The local inhabitants were gifted in handicrafts and made beautifully carved and inlaid furniture. One speciality was a comfortable cot and I would be surprised if there was not one found in the lighthouse. Colour also attracted them and everything was brightly adorned, including their fishing boats, which led in turn to another speciality – brightly painted model boats, something which his father George would have revelled in. Yet, in spite of these apparent idyllic living conditions, there was one invisible hazard that was an ever present and very great danger to Europeans – fever.

A Brush With Death

In Henry's time, there was barely a basic understanding of the sources of these 'fevers,' but it did not take Henry very long to contract one. By his own description he had a very high temperature and very acute pain; he was often delirious and slipped in and out of consciousness. On one occasion when regaining consciousness he found that the other keepers had removed him from his bed and propped him in the doorway of the lighthouse. He concluded that they had believed that his death was imminent and didn't want him lying dead in the lighthouse. Eventually he found the strength to crawl to the medicine chest and swallowed a large dose of a drug (possibly laudanum) which immediately rendered him unconscious. When he finally came around he realised that he was feeling better and was actually thinking about the children and being at home with them once again. It is very probable that Henry had fallen victim to the mosquito-borne Dengue Fever which was unknown in 1888, but still present in the Maldives in 2020 and giving cause for concern. It is not often fatal (Malaria and Yellow Fever were more potent from different mosquitoes not present on Minicoy), but in 1888 it was not known that Dengue Fever was carried by that dreaded insect. Henry exhibited the main symptoms of the illness and although he didn't specify the location of his acute pain, it can be headaches, eyes and joints that are affected. Today it is viewed with rather less concern and the official advice suggests that the illness is not expected to last beyond a week. As far as Henry was concerned he had escaped death and he wanted to be home on a traditional English lighthouse, but was Trinity House willing to forgive and forget?

If They Exist - A Word of Caution

Cousin Betty's account of events that forms the basis of the preceding few pages is based entirely upon her recollections of the stories recounted to her by her mother, Catherine, and other relatives. Her story covers three lights - Mucking, Minicoy and South Stack in that order. Yet if the evidence for the first two is difficult to reconcile then evidence for South Stack is non-existent and I have put it aside.

However, my researches have made three apparently small discoveries that could have a major impact on her chronology of those events. Among the papers of the St. Margaret's Village History Society archive is a list of light keepers extracted from the Receipt & Dispatch Ledgers of South Foreland lighthouse. On that list for 1886/87 is one H. T. Knott. This is a very broad date, but critical to our story. It means that he left Holyhead as stated by Cousin Betty, but not with the children. A sight of those ledgers would be important – if they exist.

The next piece of information concerns the Minicoy light, about which almost nothing is known except that one document suggests that an appointment there may not have exceeded 6 months. There were five consecutive years from 1886-90 in which that could have been easily achieved – but which year? Ship's passenger lists for the P&O Steamship Company could solve the problem of dates of passage – if they exist.

Finally, when Henry Thomas arrived at St. Ann's Head with the children at the end of 1890, Henry's eldest boy's previous school was entered into the Dale School Admissions Register as – 'London.' This contradicts Betty's assertion that they had come from Holyhead following Henry's time on the South Stack, when in fact he seems to have come from London. The Admissions Registers of Park School, Holyhead are crucial – if they exist.

Another Welsh Compromise

From the day of Ellen Knott's burial in January 1886 to the day that Henry's first child joined Dale School in Pembrokeshire in December 1890, it is impossible to say accurately where Henry Knott was to be found. Five years is sufficient time for him to have visited any three of the locations suggested, but four is improbable. Whether it was South Foreland or South Stack that was incorrect has not yet been established. When Henry returned to Holyhead to find the children well looked after and

very happy with their circumstances, it is not known where he had come from, but it did not take long before he learnt from Trinity House that he was to be appointed Assistant Keeper at St. Ann's Head in Pembrokeshire. Christmas 1890 would be a special celebration for everyone as the children left Park School for the last time. Catherine was 12 years old on the 1st December and she had been given some music books at school. Henry was so delighted that he bought her a piano so that she could learn to play.

1891 was a significant year in the life of the Knott Family as it was the year that Henry succeeded in bringing his long-suffering family together. The first sign that Henry had arrived at St. Ann's Head lighthouse came not from the census of April 1891, but from the school admissions register of Dale National School which had reopened on Monday 5th January after a fortnight's break for the Christmas holiday. Fifty-three pupils assembled for the new term, but it was a week later when No. 281, John Knott, was enrolled, but his sister Catherine was not with him. As has already been highlighted, there is one column in the book that rarely has an entry: it is the column for the school previously attended. Against John's name is the word 'London.'

Henry was back on Welsh soil at a lighthouse that had a deep affection within the family for its long association with the Hall and Lloyd families. Ellen would have cherished taking her own family back to her childhood haunts, but Henry had to make that journey without her. In fact he was initially still unsure about the care of his children. They had been very happy living with Elizabeth Greenhough in Newry Street, Holyhead whilst their father was abroad, but now that he was home Elizabeth accepted that they should be with their father. His problem was that he could not employ a housekeeper as there was nowhere for her to sleep in a 2-roomed lighthouse cottage. He had asked his sister-in-law whether she knew anyone who might be prepared to marry him as a working arrangement, but that unusual question didn't have an immediate answer. It was the census that revealed Henry's temporary solution - his unmarried sister, Ann Dixon Knott.

Little is known of Ann. In 1891 she was 30 years old and had avoided all bureaucratic reference to her activities until now, but Henry must have known how to contact her for she had agreed to help him out, at least until something better came along. During the course of the year something did turn up, and it seems to have been initiated by Elizabeth Greenhough. Henry was introduced to Sarah Jane

May who had agreed Henry's proposition. She would be his housekeeper and nothing more. However, I must emphasize that the chronology for these events is uncertain. What is known is that Ann Dixon Knott fulfilled the role until Christmas 1891,

The picture that the census return presents of the light station is one of stable maturity. All four residences had children. There were ten below the age of 13. Walter Warder (47) was the Principal Keeper with Stanley Blake (43) and Richard Wilson (32) as his two Assistant Keepers whilst Henry Knott (39) was fourth man and the new appointment to the station.

My reading of the school's log book for 1891 makes it clear that attendance was not everything it might have been. A formal inspection was very critical of both academic and disciplinary standards. With Easter Sunday falling very early on the 29th March the school was badly affected by influenza following their return from holiday, and it was closed for most of the month following the 13th April. Through the summer term the school was used on many occasions for concerts which caused its closure to the pupils during the afternoon whilst the room was prepared, but attendance following a closure was often poor. Summer holiday closed the school on the 28th August until the 21st September, but when it reassembled the children were told that they were no longer required to bring a penny each week as a grant for their education had been secured. Fires were lit in the classrooms for the first time on the 30th October, and they would be lit every day over the winter months. On the 30th November John Knott and James Sherlock arrived at 11 a.m. and were given 'two strokes on the bruch with a rod.' Sherlock was 12 and the son of the Commissioned Boatman Edward Sherlock in charge of the four-family coastguard station behind the lighthouse. However, this would not be the only occasion that his name was entered in the school log.

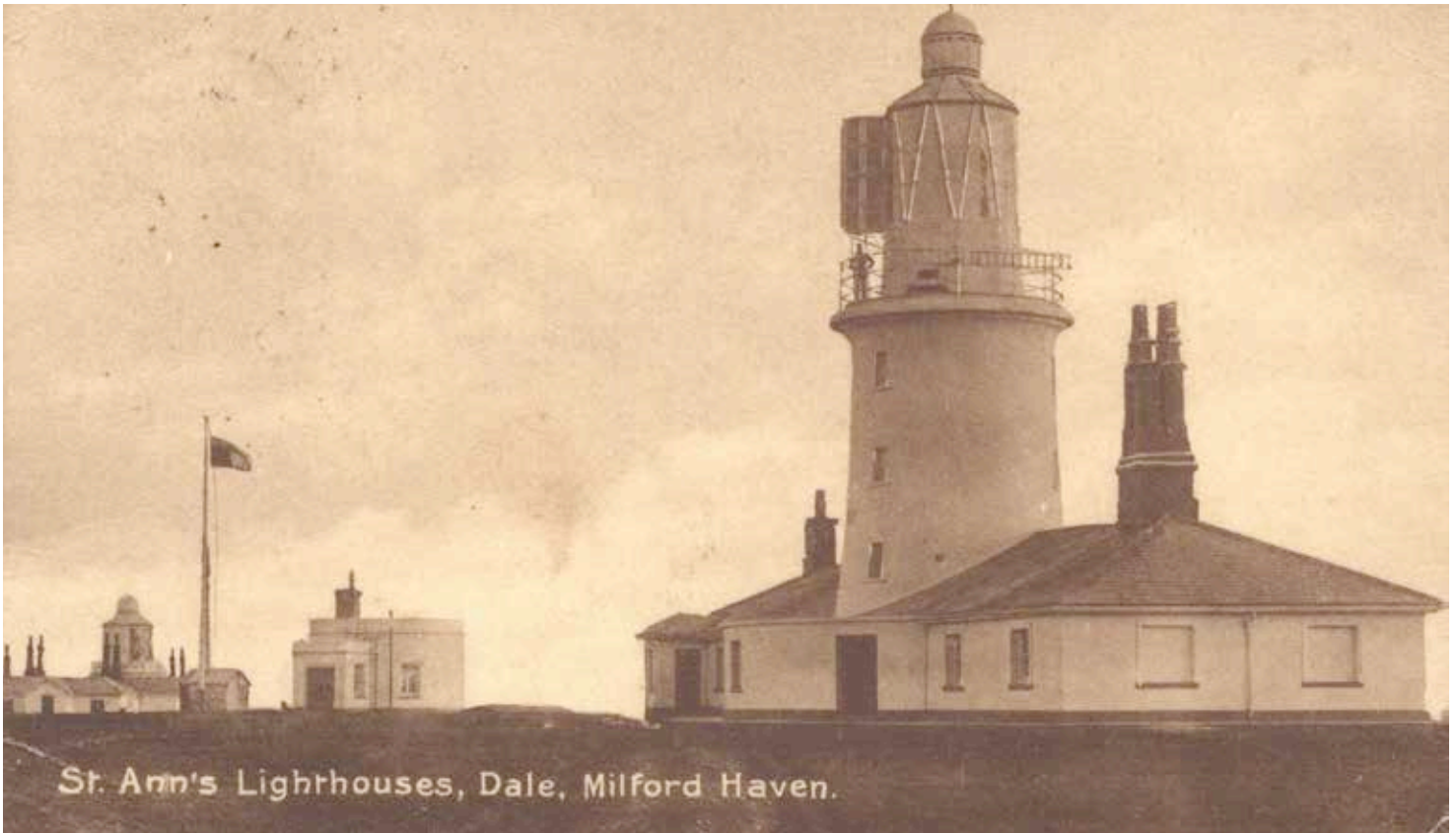
On Thursday 24th December - 'school broke up today for a fortnight's holiday. The attendance this week was poor.' On Monday 28th December 1891 Henry Thomas Knott married Sarah Jane May at the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Crewe. I wonder what sort of Christmas was enjoyed by the family?

Comfortable Years At St. Ann's Head

It was a flat-topped open headland that ended abruptly facing the Atlantic Ocean - not with the bland, uniform whiteness of the Dover chalk cliffs, but with coloured, striped striations of Devonian



ABOVE: An aerial view of the present lighthouse station at St. Ann's Head near Milford Haven in Pembrokeshire. Like South Foreland, it was once a two-light station, the original High light almost invisible here in the left centre. It was discontinued in 1910. The low light was shown from the 1844 tower in the centre and remains in use today. The lighthouse cottages have been significantly altered since the nineteenth century.



ABOVE: An early 20th century postcard showing the High and Low lighthouses at St. Ann's Head.

sandstone reaching 150 feet (46 m) above the waves. There had been lights there since 1714 and, in parallel with the South Foreland, its pair of lights had been rebuilt in 1844 with John Hall and Richard Lloyd in charge of their care. John Hall had been Henry's father-in-law until his death in 1881, and Henry had found it a pleasure to serve under him on the Skerries. Now Walter Warder had the care of them, and Henry would play his part, but he could not quite shake off the ghost of his late wife Ellen as she had grown into womanhood at St. Ann's Head.

As John Hall's children had done, Henry's children came to love the place in spite of its windswept isolation, and the two miles between them and the village of Dale didn't prevent them from having school friends. After all, it was a small village of 185 souls (1891) so children came from a very wide area. The coastal path is more than likely much older than its modern tourist marketing name of the Pembrokeshire Coast Path, but shortly after leaving the houses and walking towards Milford, a stile is reached adjacent to a crumbling stone wall. From the air its rectangular shape stands out as it imprisons a briar patch. Here were the light keepers' gardens, and with only the shelter of that wall, it was very productive. Henry's daughter Catherine remembered the bounty that came from the soft fruit which were turned into jams and wines by her step-mother. Elderberry wine was a favourite, which must have originated in the wild.

A little further along the coast path is a very small bay with a white, sandy beach, and this must have been the base for catching shrimps, crabs and lobsters as Henry made his own boat and set his own lobster pots. It was a testament to the skills he had learnt in his youth at the Appledore boatyards, and the lighthouse kitchen handled all manner of raw material for the pot. Henry even brewed a very good ale after obtaining malt from the local miller, but he needed more than malt for the end result and his recipe has not been passed on to his descendants. Those were the days of domestic industry, and it was second nature to work together for the good of everyone.

Some lighthouses that were located at a great distance from the nearest community had a donkey, and there was one at St. Ann's Head that added interest for the children. It was not exactly a pet, but it was a part of the extended family, there for the purpose of carrying heavy loads from the village or elsewhere. The load it would **not** carry was a man or a boy. Apparently, if any male got onto its back, it sat down, leaving its rider standing, but it was not a

bad-tempered animal.

Henry's tetchy temperament persisted into 1892 until his new wife wrote to his sister-in-law Elizabeth Greenhough in Holyhead whose subsequent admonishment to Henry reminded him of his obligations to Sarah Jane; she had proved herself to be a willing and proficient housekeeper, and as a result the atmosphere improved. In fact, the lighthouse cottage began to emit the sound of music as his eldest daughter mastered the piano, and Henry made a violin which he taught himself to play. This eventually enabled father and daughter to play together when relaxing on an off-duty evening. Catherine was now approaching 14 years old, and her days were probably occupied learning the skills of a housekeeper from her step-mother, but at weekends she often went into Dale to stay with a girl of her own age. Hannah Jane Phillips was the daughter of the Sub-Postmaster and they lived adjacent to Dale Castle close to the *Griffin Inn* by South Street. Hannah attended the Congregational Chapel, so they went together, and it was soon discovered that Catherine could play a very passable hymn on the chapel organ. It wasn't long before the Parish Church was seeking to use her talent every Sunday, but that was not possible. Catherine was content to play occasionally when the chapel organist was away.

Clips From The School Log Book

It had snowed heavily on Saturday 9th January 1892. The school was due to reopen after the holiday on the Monday morning, but was delayed until the Tuesday afternoon, though few pupils bothered to appear. At the end of January, Mrs. Coningsby-Erskine sent 80 pennies to the school with the instruction that one penny was to be given to each pupil. On that day 52 pupils each received their penny, and John Knott duly received his bonus, but there were 72 pupils on the books with attendance rarely above the mid-50s. Education in these times was not free and cost one penny per week. So when it is realised that this represented one week's education for 80 pupils, or 80 weeks education for 1 pupil, it is a little sobering. 80 pence was 6s-8d or one third of £1, yet so many parents purported not to be able to afford it. They needed their children to work, no matter what age they were.

A 'puffy' northeasterly wind caused the chimney to fill the classroom with smoke so badly that the teacher closed the school on Thursday Friday 18th



ABOVE: The South Bishop lighthouse is perched precariously on a high rock in St. George's Channel. It provided the station for Edmond's Knott's period of training in the 1890s.

February. The following day she tried again. She opened the school and the fire was lit, but only one boy turned up – at 10.18 a.m. He was sent home and again the school closed. Among the five songs that had been chosen from the *Evans Song Book for Boys & Girls*, to learn during the year, was one entitled – *Lighthouse*. Perhaps the Knott Family presence had a bearing on that choice.

On the 4th April the teacher was informed that measles had arrived at Dale Hill when a boy from there came in during the afternoon saying that his brother was in bed with it. Horrified, the teacher asked him to stay away from school until his brother had recovered. On the 29th April, measles was declared an epidemic and the school was closed until the 24th May. This theme repeated itself throughout the log book with other contagious illnesses that would temporarily close the school for everyone. However, on the 4th April another entry records that Alf James and John Knott were each given two strokes on the 'bruch' for coming to school at 10.15. They had spent their time playing in the road.

Alfred James had joined the school just before Christmas 1891 with his younger brother Harry and two sisters. They were the children of Corporal W.

James of the Block House; their father was in the Royal Garrison Artillery (RGA). At the census, just a few months before, the garrison of West Block House amounted to three – two gunners and a bombardier, such were the sinecures available in the days of Empire. Alf James was the same age as John Knott, so there was an inevitability about their friendship, but it was not inevitable that they should get into trouble. Today their waywardness would not be noticed. It was simply 10-year-old boys responding to the world about them. On the 27th July, they were both caned again for playing on the beach for 25 minutes after they knew the whistle had been blown. This time they were joined in the line by George Thomas, each with their hands held out at a rigid arm's length, tensed for the moment of searing pain. The following day Alfred James and his siblings left the school – there was no stability in their lives. It is clear that George Thomas remained John Knott's closest friend as on the 11th November 1893 they were caned again – for talking!

What is surprising today is the depth of discipline apparent among all the other boys. No one stepped out of line. My brother and I can both remember that feeling as a child at school. Most of us were afraid of authority. We were afraid of what it might do to us. How things have changed.



Above: The Holyhead breakwater lighthouse is a familiar sight for residents. It was not usual for Trinity House keepers to be employed here. Keepers for harbour lights were generally provided by the local authorities responsible for them.

A Light In The Midst Of A Storm

Seven miles southeast of St. Ann's Head light lay the reason for its existence – Crow Rock, and the Toes that claimed many vessels heading for or leaving the large deep-water haven of Milford. In 1890 the light had become a beckoning marker for a port that had not yet fledged. What tends to be overlooked is that Pembroke Dock was also on the haven and this naval dockyard was responsible for building some the Royal Navy's largest and most prestigious warships. During that decade plans were in motion to enlarge the dockyard as the dawn of the Dreadnought was about to break.

A study of the local newspapers for the two decades 1880 and 1890 reveals that shipwreck was almost a distant memory, but the weather is always the arbiter. To some extent, the steamship had helped to reduce the carnage of sail. A steam-driven propeller does not require the uncertainty of the wind to drive it forward, but there will always be rough weather and there will always be poor seamanship. The lighthouse could do nothing more than sit astride its clifftop and shine brightly through the night. Fog was another matter when ships of all propulsions were blind to the sea ahead

and all reference points had been lost.

The steamer *Rowena* of Glasgow struck on the Smalls in thick fog on Saturday morning 13th May 1893. She was carrying iron ore and became a total wreck. Seven of her crew found sanctuary on the rocks, but the mate with three men landed at St. Ann's Head. Shortly afterwards the *S.S. Godmunding* of London edged her way into Milford with seriously smashed bows after striking St. Govan's Head near Tenby at 2 a.m. She was fortunate in floating off the rocks and was safely docked in Milford during Saturday evening.¹⁹

A telegram was sent from St. Ann's Head reporting the loss of an unknown ship on Monday night 9th April 1894. Jack's Sound was to the north of the light beyond Skokholm and became the final resting place of the *S.S. Ogmore* which foundered there with a cargo of potatoes from Ireland destined for Cardiff.²⁰ In these three incidents, two ships were lost with their cargoes, whilst the third ship, which was in ballast without a cargo, was saved. More importantly, not a single life was lost, but that could not be said for the great storm that broke over

¹⁹ *Cardiff Times*, 20 May 1893.

²⁰ *Cardiff Times*, 14 April 1894.



ABOVE: The Smalls lighthouse of the west coast of Wales marks a large shoal of rocks where many ships were lost. On a calm day, the beauty disguises the ever-present threats. The presence of the lighthouse could not help ships smothered by fog.

Pembrokeshire on Thursday 15th October 1896.²¹ It began on the late of afternoon of Wednesday but by 7 a.m. on the Thursday morning two large barques had been completely destroyed. One was the Norwegian barque *Sea King* which had been totally dis-masted and broken to pieces on Stackpole Head with some loss of life just inside St. Govan's Head to the south, but the second barque was much closer to St. Ann's Head and its fate was watched by a farm labourer named Martin Edwards who had come to the shore to see the damage being inflicted upon his holding within sight of Skomer. The noise of the tumultuous seas was appalling, and the air was filled with sea spray so thick it was almost a fog, yet Edwards watched the stricken barque heading towards its doom to the shrieks of seven or eight sailors clinging to its rigging. The barque caught the fringe of the south haven of the island where a sliver of rocks tossed it into the air like a shuttlecock. Mountainous waves followed it through, after which the dumbstruck labourer saw no more.

Arnold Johns the No.1 Pilot at Milford Haven remarked that he had never seen a storm like it, and Jack's Sound, between Skomer and Skokholm, was so dangerous that not a single insurance company would underwrite the risk of a master choosing to use that passage. The coastguard at St. Ann's Head eventually found wreckage with the words, *Venus – Lisbon*, upon it and, if that proved to be correct, she was a fine ship of 300 tons with a crew of 15.

²¹ *Cardiff Times*, 17 October 1896.

It's Time To Think Of Leaving St. Ann's

Following the initial uncertainty regarding the presence of a housekeeper at the St. Ann's light, Henry's solution proved to be exactly what was needed for the family – stability. The disruption to the older children's education seemed to be mitigated by his sister-in-law in Holyhead, and did not appear to affect Catherine's attitude in any way. When they arrived at St. Ann's Head, Catherine's school days were over as it was not compulsory for children over the age of 11 to attend school. Those under the age of 13 who were employed were required to have a certificate to show they had reached the educational standard; employers of these children who weren't able to show this were penalized. In 1895, John was 14 years old, but curiously he didn't leave school until December 1896 when he was 15, yet Hilda left in June 1895 when she had turned 11 years old. The twins were a little younger and it is clear that the District Superintendent left Henry's name off the transfer lists during the 1890s so that all the children could finish their days at Dale School.

In 1896 news reached Henry that his brother Edmond had arrived at Neyland with his new wife Alice, and it didn't take long before they were arranging to send Violet the 17 miles to Neyland to be company for Alice: Edmond was often away on the South Bishop rock lighthouse. The journey to Neyland probably took two hours on a carrier's



LEFT: The island of Skokholm also has a lighthouse which, together with Smalls and South Bishop, make a precious threesome of lights to mark the dangerous passage near the coast of west Wales. The larger island of Skomer has never had a light.

van, if there was such a thing in Dale. Violet left the school on the 2nd December 1896 when she was 10 years old, and she was away until the 20th October 1897 when she rejoined Dale School once again. Attitudes towards the schooling of girls were lax in those days, and it was not unusual to have a young girl in the house as a ‘companion,’ though, more often than not, she was simply a domestic servant. However, the school log does contain evidence that absences were being monitored, and parents were being visited by attendance inspectors if children took long absences from school.

On Sunday 20th June 1897 Queen Victoria celebrated her Diamond Jubilee and the world could not pretend that it didn’t know, yet the huge event is not mentioned in the school log book, and the teacher seems to resent the School Treat on the 22nd June that forced the closure of the school simply because ‘no one would have turned up.’ It wasn’t much better the next morning when there were only 27 in school.

It was 1899 when Henry had to accept that his time at St. Ann’s Head was over. If it is correct to surmise that the District Superintendent had held back from moving Henry to another light, then Trinity House had also held back on his promotion to Principal Keeper. As far as I can tell, there were no rigid criteria to be met, but most men could expect their promotion within 10-15 years. Henry had been a keeper now for almost 25 years before he returned to the Skerries as its Principal. That was one rule

that seemed to be kept - a rock lighthouse as the first appointment for a new PK. The family left St. Ann’s Head in September 1899 during the summer holiday at Dale School. This is suggested in the school log against Violet’s name. No specific date is recorded - simply ‘Sept,’ suggesting that she did not return to school when it re-opened.

Little has Changed in Holyhead

At this point, almost inevitably, Cousin Betty is again at odds with the probabilities, even when evidence is not available. She wrote of Catherine;

“In 1898 her father (Henry) was appointed to the South Stack lighthouse with the family living in Cambrian Street, Holyhead.”

This approximates to the death of Henry Jenkins as PK at the Skerries in 1897 and the Knott Family leaving St. Ann’s Head and Dale School, although that event is imprecise. Yet there is no disputing the fact that the family returned to Holyhead, where events moved swiftly. Betty’s mother, Catherine, went back to live with Elizabeth Greenhough, who had now moved house from Newry Street to Newry Fawr, a street which is still there along with the house. It is the last house on the right before the green, and turning right as you leave the front door will lead you to the beach with its white sand and view across the harbour to the Breakwater and its lighthouse. It was from No. 18 that Catherine married William Ballyn in St. Sieriol’s Church on

the 12th September 1900. They met when Catherine joined the choir of the parish church of St. Cybi, where her aunt attended services occasionally, so they had met, become engaged and married all within the year, and Henry lost his eldest daughter to a ship steward.

His son, John, now 18 (in 1899) is reported to 'have become an apprentice engineer in the 'Marine Yard,' but he was a little old for a new apprenticeship and he has not been found in the 1901 census, so he may have been a trainee engineer on board ship. This disappointed Henry as he was hoping that his son might have joined the Trinity House light keeping service, but that was not to be.

Henry settled into Cambrian Street with Sarah Jane, but at the 1901 census the children were not conforming to Betty's account of events. No 31 Cambrian Terrace (the original address before it was changed to 'Street') was home to 'Jennet' Knott and the twins, Mabel and Violet who were both 15 and not employed. Hilda, aged 16, was with her Aunt Elizabeth at No. 18 Newry Fawr. Elizabeth was designated as a 'Lodging House Keeper' and Hilda was her 'Domestic Servant' with her lodger being John Bain, who at 80 years old was a retired 'Curator of Material.' Next door at No.16 there were also lodgers. Two men in their 30s were engine fitters, an indication of the path that John Knott had taken.

This was the situation that had evolved around Henry's new appointment, but it was the Skerries, not South Stack. All the women of the family appeared content with their lot, but what about Henry? What did he find in his new role as Principal Keeper on the Skerries?

A Second Bite at the Skerries

Henry's promotion was new. This was the first time that he had been recorded in that rank on an English or Welsh lighthouse, and he must have been pleased to accept responsibility for what was, quite naturally, his favourite lighthouse. The fog horn was not new. It had been installed in 1876 when Henry was there before, but at that time Henry was not sensitive to its use. He was now. It was a conical cast iron trumpet, 25 inches (63 cm) in diameter at its mouth. It was driven by compressed air created by two large calorific engines in the engine house driving a compressor. The resultant noise was considered to be the most powerful and controllable available to man and had a range of six miles. But Henry had come to hate its ghostly noise, and when it continued for hours he admitted that he was

ready to jump off the rock. These circumstances had driven his father from Bull Point when, just a few years before, he had asked to be moved away to a station without a foghorn. He had been appointed to North Foreland, which brought him home to the county of his birth.

It is difficult to say with any certainty how long Henry was the Principal Keeper at the Skerries, but it might be within the period 1899-1902. In that period nothing had changed except the keepers, but plans were afoot to drastically alter the light to show a fixed red light over a dangerous cluster of rocks that included the *Ethel* and *Coal Rocks*. A new tower would be required on the landward side, but this was not begun until sometime in 1903 for completion by October 1904, by which time Henry had left for Devon.

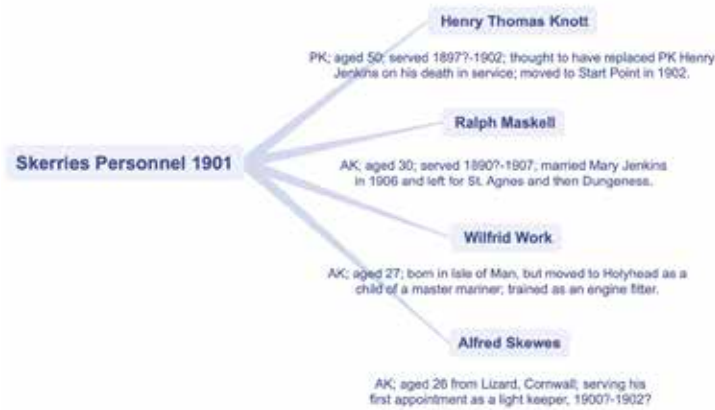
The three Assistant Keepers in Henry's crew in 1901 were almost half his age and very likely unknown to him. All three were bachelors – Ralph Maskell, Wilfrid Work and Alfred Skewes.

Ralph and Mary Maskall

Ralph Maskall (30) was from Hornsey, London. He came to the Skerries before 1901 as an ageing, confirmed bachelor, the son of a commercial traveller from London, but he left in 1907 married to a light keeper's daughter. Mary Rose Jenkins had been born in the South Wales district of Bridgend, which suggests that her parents, Henry Thomas Jenkins and Mary, were at the Usk Light in 1878. Mary Rose was their fourth child and they were to have one more named Harriet in 1881, but all the birth registrations are not simple conversions into lighthouses as is often the case. Henry Jenkins had been born in 1843 at Whippingham, outside East Cowes, where his father was a Trinity House seaman, and in 1846 Henry was joined by a brother, William. They both joined the lighthouse service when they came of age.

Ralph Maskall did not share that background and has been impossible to find in any census prior to 1901. His appearance at the Skerries, as if by magic, is something of a mystery. He was eight years older than his new wife when they married at Holyhead parish church in November 1906 from 20 Cambria Street. They left Holyhead soon afterwards for St. Agnes on the Isles of Scilly, and they were still there in 1911 before moving to Dungeness before 1913.

It was their marriage certificate that gave one small clue about Henry Knott's elusive movements. I retained a faint hope that he might have been



a witness to the ceremony, but instead of his signature, there was the note that Mary's father was deceased. That required investigation and it was found that he had died at Holyhead's Stanley Hospital in July 1897. This was the Stanley Sailors' Hospital situated on Salt Island which was a charitable hospital for mariners established in 1871. Henry Jenkins was buried in the churchyard at Holyhead aged 54, so he must have been the Principal at the Skerries and the man that Henry Knott came to replace.

Wilfrid and Margaret Work

Wilfrid Work was 27 and from Ramsay on the Isle of Man. When I discovered that his unusual surname had its roots in Shetland and Orkney I immediately thought that he had come from a family of light keepers, as the Northern Lighthouse Board was (and is today) responsible not only for Scotland, but also for the Isle of Man. However, I was only partially correct. His father, Sinclair Work, came from Sandwich on Shetland, and was a Master Mariner who had moved from the Manx Island to the Welsh island of Anglesey sometime between 1874 (Wilfrid's birth) and 1877 (Laura's birth). Wilfrid's mother, Sarah, had been born in Pembrokeshire in 1837 and her first child, Sarah Jane, had been born in Neyland in 1869, yet all lighthouse connections were entirely circumstantial.²² All five of the family were living at 9 Station Street, Holyhead, and Sinclair was now retired at 66 years old.

Having established that they had been settled in Holyhead for some time, I checked the 1891 census to find that Wilfrid, at 17 years old, was a fitter, not unlike the trade chosen by John Knott. However, the attraction of Trinity House with its security of employment was always very strong and a mechanical inclination could be readily used on a light station. The fog signal engines were a

case in point: they had to be kept running and in good order, and to do that reliably required a good engineering background, so Wilfrid was a useful hand to have on board. He married at the end of 1901 and in 1911 he was with his wife Margaret on the Withernsea light in east Yorkshire without children.

Alfred and Ann Skewes

Alfred Skewes (26) was from the Lizard in Cornwall. The youngest keeper, he had been baptised at Landewednack on the 30th April 1875. As the surname Work was to the Scottish Islands, so Skewes was to west Cornwall, and although Alfred's baptism occurred in the parish of the Lizard Lights, his father John was not a light keeper. In 1871 the young family all lived in Lizard Town and John Skewes was a buss (sic) driver – and that is exactly what the census record shows. This was repeated again in 1891 when Alfred was 16 years old and unemployed. With such a large gap before the next census it is impossible to estimate when Alfred joined Trinity House, but with such famous neighbours, and the uninspiring prospect of rural labouring, it is likely that he was tempted by the allure of employment with Trinity House. It only needed a word with the District Superintendent on one of his visits to the light and the path would be set. It is unlikely to have been much before 1899 as the Skerries would have been his induction into light-keeping. He probably moved to Hartland Point in Devon by 1903 as he married a local Devonian girl, Ann Maria Dunn, at the beginning of 1904 and he was still a light keeper in 1911.

The Devon Years 1902 – 1908

It has been highlighted previously that there are instances in the story told by Cousin Betty that need careful scrutiny. This is another. She wrote:

“Mother married William Ballyn in St. Seriol's Church in September 1900. Soon after this Henry Knott was appointed to Start Point Lighthouse in South Devon. At the end of 1907, mother and my eldest brother Clifford, with the new baby, went from Liverpool, where we were now living, to spend three weeks with her father, step-mother and the twins whilst I was sent to Holyhead. After Start Point he was appointed to Barnstaple and from there to Bideford and then to Bull Point, where he made a painting of the lighthouse as it was in his time there. It was here that he had a slight stroke and had to retire.”

²² 1901 Census, RG13/5297 Folio 53 p10.



ABOVE: An old photographic postcard showing Start Point lighthouse in South Devon. The image is contemporary with Henry's penultimate appointment in the early part of the 20th century.



ABOVE: A modern view of Start Point lighthouse. Like Bull Point, the station was badly damaged in a rock fall in 1990. The building that housed the deafening fog signal was lost. However, unlike Bull Point, its tower survived and is in use today,

My reader might wonder why it is that Betty's statement is treated with caution and cannot be accepted as fact, but it is apparent that there was not enough time to achieve all that she attributed to him. If it is assumed that Henry took up residence at Start Point in 1902, his twin girls, Violet and May, were 16 years old. The location is a long way from any substantial town, being remote from the Kingsbridge - Dartmouth road. They were five miles from that main road where the large village and parish church at Stokenham were to be found. It was not the best of places for two girls who had spent most of their lives in the bustling ferry port of Holyhead.

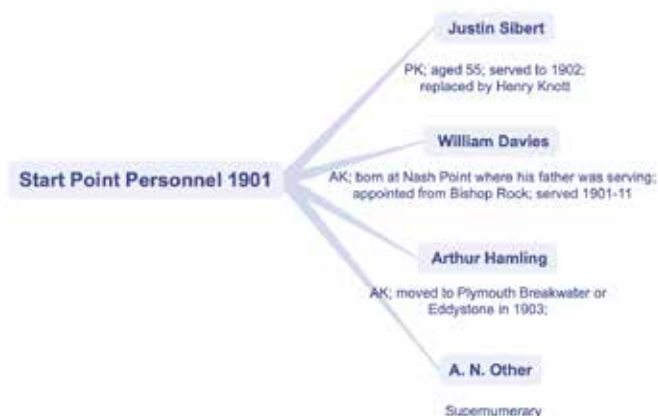
Justin and Sarah Sibert

The 1901 census shows that the PK in charge of Start Point was Justin Sibert who had been in Holyhead in 1897 for the birth of his son, William. He was also at Start Point for the birth of his last daughter, Winifred in 1902, but it was unfortunate that they chose not to baptize their children, as that would have introduced more accurate dates. Study of the Stokenham parish registers revealed that none of the light keepers used the church during the period 1902 to 1908. In fact, there was only one entry for a light keeper before the onset of war and the end of the register in October 1914. It is also curious that Sibert and Knott were tracking one another in such close proximity. In 1902, Sibert was 56 years old with a much younger second wife and a very large family, but he was a Plymothian. It would be easy to jump to the conclusion that he was 'coming home' to retire, but that is far from the truth. In retirement in 1911 he was in Wood Green, north London, not far from the Alexandra Palace. But when did he retire?

A five-year appointment for a Principal Keeper was common, so Henry's suggested time at Start Point is quite acceptable and the holiday visit in 1907 described by Betty is accurate, as the new baby was Cecil Claude, born at the beginning of 1907. Having said that, it was quite a journey to undertake from Liverpool with a 6-month old baby, and the lighthouse cottage would have been very crowded.

William and Edith Davies

It was perhaps fortunate that the one other keeper known to have been there in 1907 only had one child. William Davies (1901-11) was there for a very long time and it was his second daughter, Vera, who was born on the light in October 1910. William and Edith wisely waited until February 1911



before making the long walk to Stokenham for Vera's baptism on Friday 17th February when William was 'off duty.' When William Davies married Edith Rowe in Helston in 1899, he had travelled from St. Mary's in the Isles of Scilly, suggesting that he was doing his induction into the service on the Bishop Rock. His wife was the daughter of the miller at Helston Mills, and that was where she returned for the birth of their first child, in spite of being on a family station at Start Point. William was named after his father who was also a light keeper and who had been at Nash Point when his son was born, so William junior was very much a part of the service tradition.

Arthur and Edith Hamling

Start Point had a four-man crew and in 1901 one of those men was a 'flying supernumerary' who would not have stayed for very long. William Davies' colleague was Arthur Hamling who, like William, was also a Trinity man. Arthur was born in Great Yarmouth where his father was a fireman on the Trinity Yacht, the name of which was unfortunately illegible. He married Edith Mexter in Dovercourt in 1900 before coming to Start Point in time for the census in April 1901, leaving his wife in Ipswich for the birth of their first child. The 1901 census²³ shows that she was living with her father, William Mexter, a mariner, who was also a widower in a semi-detached cottage coincidentally named Devonian Cottage. It also shows that her new daughter, Gladys, had been born 2 months earlier, maybe with the help of her younger sister Alice. Unlike William Davies, Arthur didn't stay on the light long enough to get to know Henry and his family, as he moved to Plymouth before the summer of 1903. It is not known to which of Plymouth's two lights he was allocated, but they had two children in Plymouth before moving on to

²³ 1901 Census, RG13/1777 Folio 115 p3.

Hartland Point before 1908. However, they were all back in Plymouth again by 1911 when William was found serving on Plymouth's Breakwater Light with Edith living in a 3-roomed flat in Neath Road, St. Judes, a road I knew well as the home of my own Best Man in 1963.

So, 1907 was the last year that I can say with confidence that Henry was at Start Point. It was also the year of a significant wreck on Bolt Tail in circumstances that today we would find astonishing. On Sunday 17th March the Elder Dempster Line steam ship *Jebba* was steaming up-Channel from Lagos in West Africa with 70 passengers, heading for Plymouth in stormy, conditions with poor visibility. They intended to use the Eddystone as a mark in the early hours of the morning, but they neither saw its light nor heard its fog bell. Some said that they mistook the light from Start Point, but the captain was confident that he knew where he was and turned to port. Shortly afterwards a horrified lookout saw breakers dead ahead and the captain ordered the helm hard 'a starboard assuming that he was turning across the wide expanse of Plymouth Sound. Instead, it was Bolt Tail and they slammed broadside into its 250 foot (76 m) high cliffs.²⁴ Fortunately the local coastguard was quickly on the scene with their rocket apparatus, and using a Breeches Buoy, all passengers were rescued followed by the crew. Inevitably there was a Court of Inquiry, and during these occasions the log books of the nearest lighthouses are always scrutinized - in this case, those of the Eddystone and Start Point. Their contents regarding the weather and the state of the light and fog signals become crucial evidence, but on this occasion it was the captain who was clearly and personally to blame. It was a tense time until the court published its findings.

Bull Point and One Last Move

Henry's last move was to Bull Point lighthouse at Morteohoe in North Devon, a Knott Family light.²⁵ His father, George Knott, had been its first Principal Keeper when he lit it for the first time in 1879. The crew at Bull Point was only three keepers instead of four, in spite of it having a fog signal engine. We do not know who was there to meet Henry on his arrival for the three keepers present in 1911 were not there in 1907/08. It was here at Bull Point that Henry suffered his first 'slight' stroke in

1908, at the age of 57 and it was the end of his career as a light keeper. It was ironic that it should end here, for George had left in 1888 because of that terrible fog horn. On his return to the Skerries, ten years before, Henry had already admitted that the sound of the fog horn drove him to the point of desperation. As Principal Keeper, the decision to activate the fog signal was his to make, and if the noise was psychologically painful then there was every reason to delay it. Yet any delay, if reported to Trinity House, would lead to a disciplinary inquiry. This decision became a stressful 'no win' situation and it is stresses such as these that could contribute towards a stroke. When Henry was no longer fit enough to continue his duties, his wife Sarah Jane, decided that they should return to live in Crewe where she had retained a number of friends, but Henry's retirement was cut short. In early July 1910, Henry's daughters, Catherine Ballyn and Hilda Phillips, received telegrams from their step-mother with the news that their father was seriously ill and that they should come to Crewe without delay. Henry's second stroke was paralytic. He could neither move, nor speak. He could not eat or drink. In short, he was not expected to live.

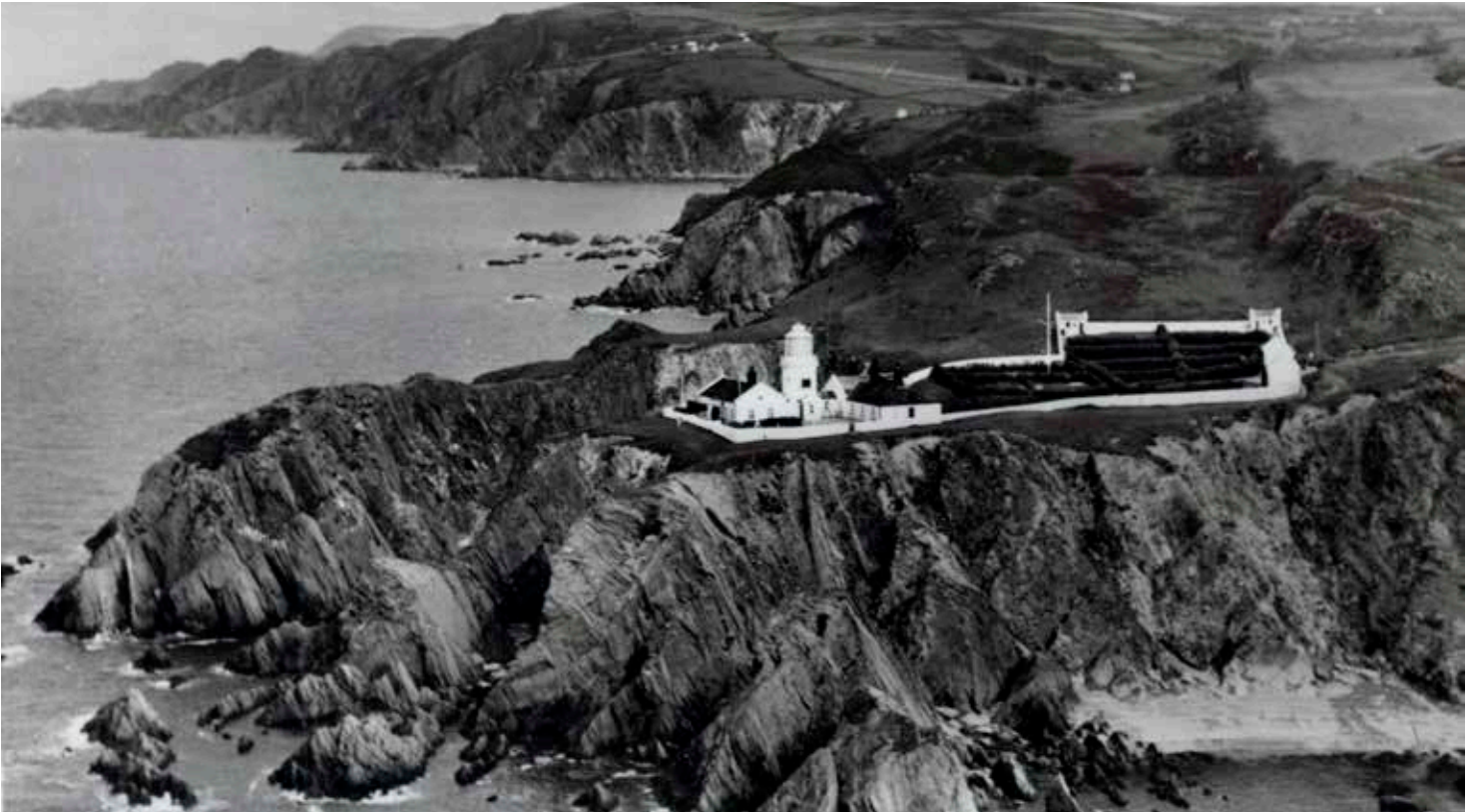
The reaction of Henry's wife to the imminent visit of his daughters was not unusual, but it was somewhat pre-emptive as she started loading them down with Henry's treasured possessions. Catherine was given a beautifully inlaid cribbage board and a framed drawing of the Skerries. Hilda received another picture and the violin he had made whilst at St Ann's Head to accompany Catherine's piano playing. It was all embarrassing, and both girls returned to Liverpool very unhappy.

Henry Thomas Knott died on Sunday 24th July 1910 at 4 Clifton Avenue, Coppenhall, Crewe, which his wife later put to good use as a boarding house, its six rooms taking in young lady pupil teachers and providing rent to support herself and Violet who was still in her care. Crewe is a typical, unpretentious railway town, the home of the erstwhile London & North Western Railway, with its brick, terraced houses lining a grid system of roads. Clifton Avenue is still there today, to the south of the railway works, looking much as it did in Henry's brief time there.

The last in the line of the Knott dynasty that we have followed in this story for 200 years ended with a cerebral hemorrhage, and Henry's death was reported to the local registrar by someone unknown. Family stories don't come much stranger than this one.

²⁴ *Western Morning News*, 19 March 1907.

²⁵ A full history is given in Ken Trethewey's book *Lighthouses of Cornwall and Devon* (2021).



ABOVE: An aerial view of the Bull Point lighthouse showing its vulnerable site. The beautiful keepers' garden is notable in this photo. The lighthouse was partially lost in a cliff collapse in 1972. BELOW: The foghorn is the focus of this postcard of Bull Point lighthouse in the early 1900s. Hated by George Knott during his tenure as its first PK, it may have contributed to the stroke that killed Henry Thomas Knott so soon after his retirement.

