

A close-up photograph of a lighthouse lens, showing its intricate glass structure and the light source within. The lens is set against a dark background, and the light source is visible as a bright, glowing sphere.

# The development of lighthouses

Early lighthouses could be very ineffectual as they gave mixed signals. There was no regulation of the brightness or position of the light and they rarely marked the real hazards seafarers faced.

Being generally fuelled by wood or coal they were also highly dependent on people keeping the fire burning.

The first lighthouse built by Trinity House was at Lowestoft in 1609, which was part of a series of lights to help guide vessels through a maze of sandbanks between Happisburgh and Lowestoft. The lighthouses were paid for by a levy charged on vessels leaving the ports of Newcastle, Hull, Boston and King's Lynn, a method of payment which is similar to the current light dues system that remains in use today.

The next two hundred years saw a proliferation of lighthouses, many privately owned, with an annual fee paid either to the Crown or Trinity House. The owners of the private lights were allowed to levy light dues from passing ships when they reached port. The reliability of many of the private lights left much to be desired and so in 1836 legislation for compulsory purchase of all private lights in England, Wales and the Channel Islands was passed and they were placed under the management of Trinity House. The previous owners were compensated on the basis of their receipts from light dues, a payment of nearly half a million in respect of Skerries Lighthouse, off Anglesey.

