



# Trinity House

## A Brief History of Trinity House



It is often stated that the origins of Trinity House date back to a charitable guild of sea Samaritans established by Archbishop Stephen Langton in the 12th Century.



The first official record is the granting of a Royal Charter by Henry VIII on 20 May 1514 to a fraternity of mariners called the Guild of the Holy Trinity "so that they might regulate the pilotage of ships in the King's streams". At the time of inception, this charitable Guild owned a great hall and almshouses, close to the Naval Dockyard at Deptford on the River Thames.



The granting of the charter came as a result of a petition given to him the year before by the 'Masters, rulers and mariners of the King's Navy in the Thames and other places' dated 13 March 1513. While no official paper records survive to corroborate the evidence two gravestones in Leigh Church in Essex indicate the existence of an organisation concerned with the welfare of seafarers on the coasts of England in the fifteenth century. The gravestones each record the name of a 'Trinity Brother' lying beneath.

Elizabeth I granted the Coat of Arms to Trinity House in 1573. The motto "Trinitas in Unitate" literally means "Three in One" and is believed to refer to God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost.

In 1604 James I conferred on Trinity House rights concerning compulsory pilotage of shipping and the exclusive right to license pilots in the River Thames. Until its responsibility for District Pilotage was transferred to Port and Harbour Authorities under the 1987 Pilotage Act, Trinity House was the Pilotage Authority for London and over 40 other districts, including the major ports of Southampton and Harwich.

Today the Corporation is comprised of a fraternity of approximately 300 Brethren drawn from the Royal and Merchant Navies and leading figures in the shipping industry. Since 1969 HRH The Duke of Edinburgh has been Master of Trinity House.

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## Seamarks and Ballastage

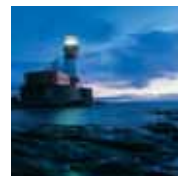
Trinity House's connection with seamarks dates to the Seamarks Act of 1566 which gave the organisation the powers to set up *"So many beacons, marks and signs for the sea...whereby the dangers may be avoided and escaped and ships the better come into their ports without peril"*. Unfortunately, Trinity House's funds were extremely limited until 1594 when the Lord High Admiral of England surrendered his rights to the sale of dredged ballast to sailing vessels discharging their cargoes in the port of London. The rights to ballastage passed to Trinity House who took over responsibility for dredging shingle from the bed of the River Thames and sold it to the masters requiring ballastage. With the rapid growth of shipping to the port of London, ballastage was a very profitable business. However, business declined at the end of the nineteenth century, when steel ships capable of holding seawater ballast were introduced.

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## Lighthouses

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.



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