

*A wee bit
of maritime
history... 4*

FREE



THE LIGHTING OF ROCK ANGUS



The Irish Sea coasts of the Lecale and the Ards Peninsula have numerous rocky hazards. In the days of sail, when all bulk goods were moved by sea, many vessels came to grief on them, particularly during stormy weather. This was especially true of the entrance to Strangford Lough, which is narrow and guarded by numerous rocks and shallow passages.



Although Rock Angus lies about halfway between Killard Point in the Lecale and Ballyquintin Point at the tip of the Ards Peninsula, the passage to its west is shallow and so vessels approaching and leaving the lough must stay to its east. Even this is tricky, as the channel narrows to about 300 metres. Imagine being the master of a sail-powered trading vessel and being completely dependent on the wind and tide and you will appreciate the difficulty of entering the lough safely, particularly at night. Many failed.

On a dark October night in 1715, a vessel, the *Eagle's Wing*, was driven ashore in a terrible gale and wrecked with the loss of 76 lives including women and children. As a result, in 1720, a 30-foot high, whitewashed, stone-built beacon was erected on the rock ... but with no light.

Shipwrecks continued to occur but, despite a request from Strangford Lough traders for the installation of a light in 1839, no action was taken. A further petition in 1846 did lead to the erection of a perch on St. Patrick's Rock and, later in the year, the decision to erect a new beacon tower on Rock Angus, but the authorities felt that a light was still not needed. It has also been suggested that the decision was influenced by pressure from Belfast commercial interests, intent on protecting their income. In 1853, today's solid 40-foot tower of interlocking granite blocks was completed. Local merchants and mariners said it was a waste of public money to replace a beacon with another beacon.

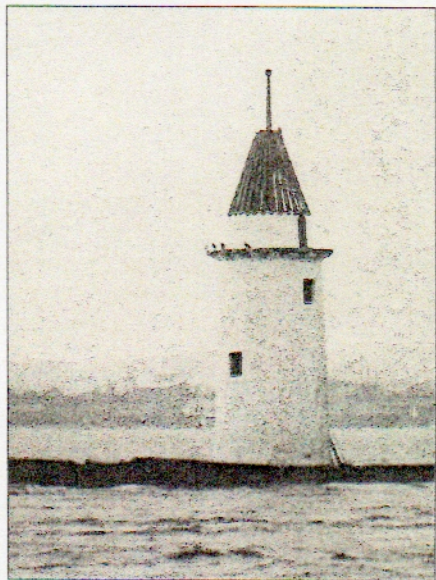
In 1861 the brigantine *Manchester* of Dublin was wrecked on Angus Rock in a SSW gale with the loss of all hands. The jury at the inquest declared "We are strongly of the opinion that if the lighthouse on Rock Angus had been lit on the night this accident occurred the vessel would not, in all probability, have been lost, and that the lives of the unfortunate men would have been saved." Commentary on the incident in the press was extensive and scathing ... "The name it goes by is the notorious 'Real Irish lighthouse, without a light in it'" ... "Sooth to say, enlightening is not their province" ... "There stands the column, a hollow mockery, and the subject of many a taunting jibe against Ireland and Irish Lighthouses (or Dark Lanterns) to the passing seaman".

In 1877 "a ship owner in Strangford stated that between 1833 and 1867 seventy vessels were wrecked or seriously injured and forty-three lives lost, and it is attributed chiefly to this cause" i.e. the lack of a light.

There was a large amount of traffic passing. Between 1867 and 1874, 3357 vessels entered the lough for trade, and a further 1577 for shelter. Despite this, shipowners and mariners were told that Strangford Lough and harbour were not of sufficient consequence to be properly lighted.

There followed repeated articles in and letters to the local press urging the installation of a light on the beacon. Representation was made to the Board of Irish Lights and the President of the Board of Trade and questions were even asked in Westminster, but all to no avail.

In March 1969 the 500-ton coaster *Kingsgate* grounded on the still unlit Angus Rock. Two months later the Commissioners of Irish Lights said that, if the leading marks were lit, they would consider providing a light on Rock Angus.



Down Recorder, 14 Mar 1969

Eventually, in October 1978, the decision was taken to proceed. Initially, the Bar Pladdy buoy was replaced with a lighted one. The Angus Rock light was finally installed and flashed for the first time on 7th April 1983, with a red flash every five seconds and a range of 6.5 nautical miles. It was 263 years since the first beacon was built and 130 years after its own tower was erected before Angus Rock lighthouse realised its destiny.



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