

Woollahra Library Local History Centre



Hornby Light



Marking the entrance to Sydney Harbour

The picturesque Hornby Light, situated on the Inner South Head, serves to mark the ocean entrance to the harbour as well lighting the South Reef, a ledge of submerged rocks. The tower is made of curved dressed sandstone painted with red and white vertical stripes, with a metal balcony and railing at the level of the light. It, along with two cottages for the keeper and attendants, were constructed during 1857-1858 following two shipping disasters near the heads to Sydney Harbour.

The Dunbar

In August 1857 the ship *Dunbar* was wrecked trying to enter Sydney Harbour at night during a gale, with the loss of 121 lives. Another ship the *Catherine Adamson* was wrecked on North Head in October of the same year, also with the loss of lives.

Investigation into further navigational aids

The disaster of the *Dunbar* prompted investigations about the provision of further navigational aids on the harbour entrance. The Light, Pilot and Navigation Board took evidence in September 1857 in *reference to additional lighthouse for Port Jackson*. The Board recommended that a tower should be erected on the inner South Head that would show a fixed white light.

Red Light or White Light

There had been some debate about whether a red light was preferable, however a white light was deemed less confusing and would also have a more effective reflection over the entire South Reef. The report suggested building a stone lighthouse to a height of thirty feet. Its base would be sixty feet above the high tide mark. The government stores had a catoptric lantern available that could be used in the new lighthouse (catoptric lanterns use curved mirrors to intensify the light).

Architect – Alexander Dawson

The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that the Colonial Architect thought the recommended position offered a good foundation, and that the cost of building the lighthouse and the keepers cottages would be approximately £2732 (SMH 29.10.1857 p.4). The Colonial Architect at the time was Alexander Dawson.

Hornby Light

The *Government Gazette* on the 4th June 1858 announced that it would be known as Hornby Light. The name Hornby had family associations for the then Governor of New South Wales Sir William Denison. His wife Caroline was the daughter of Admiral Sir Phipps Hornby, who was the Commander in Chief of the British Pacific Fleet during the 1860s.

Who was the head lighthouse keeper?

The first head lighthouse keeper at Hornby Light was Henry Johnson, a sailmaker from the Channel Islands.

Lighting

The original lamp was fuelled by kerosene. This was later changed to incandescent gas lighting and then electricity was introduced in 1933. Following the change to electricity lighthouse keepers were no longer employed to man the light. In 1948 a modern lens was installed and the light became occulting, or flashing, instead of being a fixed light. The light is visible for 22 kilometres.

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