

44 **The
South Foreland
Lighthouse**

SYLVIA AND WALTER PARKINSON

When we heard in 1988 that Trinity House was going to close the South Foreland Lighthouse many of the residents of St. Margaret's were sad that the light would be extinguished after standing on top of the cliffs for centuries and sending its light out over the straits guiding shipping around the notorious Goodwin Sands. The tower in its present form has stood since 1843. Also there were fears of what might be developed on the site. Then on 30th September 1988 the Lighthouse was closed and the wait began to see who would buy this piece of St. Margaret's history.

Then in 1989 we learned the glad news that the South Foreland Lighthouse had been bought by the National Trust. Later on, it was opened to the public one weekend free of charge. We took this opportunity to pay another visit to the Lighthouse, having had a look around with the History Society a year or so before. During our visit we saw a clipboard and paper on a table asking if anybody was interested in being a volunteer to help run the Lighthouse as a tourist attraction.

THE SOUTH FORELAND LIGHTHOUSE - 1924

With acknowledgements to the Francis Frith Collection



Having visited other National Trust properties and seeing the stewards standing or sitting in rooms and answering questions we thought that we could do that nicely, as we were retired. Several people had already put their names down, so we added ours. A little later on we were invited to a meeting in the tower and sat around on the first floor, on steps, milk crates or planks of wood, and learned that this was going to be a special Trust property.

Visitors as they climbed the stairs would find a person on each floor who would explain the workings and the history of the light and also of the many interesting things in the surrounding area. The second surprise was that we had been 'selected' to organise the volunteers into groups (or, nautically, watches) for each Saturday afternoon from April to October, 2 p.m. to 5.30. Also we would have to look after everyday expenses and arrange educational visits for groups. We opened in April 1990, had a very successful year and followed that in 1991 by opening on Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holiday Mondays.

We have a wonderful band of volunteers who talk to our visitors and who, judging by the remarks written in our visitors' book, are very much appreciated. Groups that come to the Lighthouse include youth groups, i.e. Scouts, Guides and schools, and adult groups such as Rotary clubs, National Trust members and societies.

In the 1950's one of the two keeper's cottages was demolished as due to automation only one resident keeper was needed. Now this cottage has been perfectly rebuilt, we have a new information room, and the tower has been repainted.

We now look forward to a new season starting on 2 April and to meeting many people from every corner of the globe.

I think we must be grateful to the National Trust and other such bodies who are making sure our historical buildings and beautiful countryside are protected for future generations to enjoy. ◇

Membership Secretary's Report – Spring 1994

We are pleased to be able to maintain the subscription at its present level (£4 or £6 joint for two members living at the same address) for 1994-95. Nevertheless costs have increased. In order to save postage I shall not, in future, reply with a cheque acknowledgement and renewal membership card when subscriptions are paid. If you particularly wish to know that I have received your money safely please request a reply when sending the money in. Of course prompt payment of subscriptions is the most effective economy – they are due on 1 April. I also recommend our Standing Order scheme. Please ask for a form if you would like to pay that way.

The Committee feels that it is good for members to know each other. In future, starting with the next *Newsletter*, we will, in each issue, welcome members who have joined in the preceding four months. We will, of course, respect the privacy of any new member who does not wish his or her name to be included.

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