

What Is a Lighthouse?

A lighthouse is a building or structure which projects light to warn ships and boats. They highlight coastlines and reefs and can also assist with navigation. They are usually found on cliffs, at the entrance to a harbour and in the water on a raised stand.

History of Lighthouses

Lighthouses have changed somewhat since they were first invented. The first warning system used fires on top of hills, which warned sailors of land. By raising the fires on platforms, they were more easily seen and this led to the invention of the lighthouse.

Initially, lighthouses were there only to warn of harbours rather than rocks or reefs underwater. The first known lighthouse was next to the island of Pharos, Egypt. It was eventually destroyed by an earthquake.



In Britain, the first lighthouse was built at the time when stronger and more weatherproof lighthouses were being invented. The Eddystone Rocks were a shipwreck hazard for those sailing through the English Channel and the first lighthouse there was an octagonal wooden structure. It was the first tower to be exposed to open sea. It has been rebuilt three times.

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Interesting Fact

Some countries still call a lighthouse a 'Pharos'.

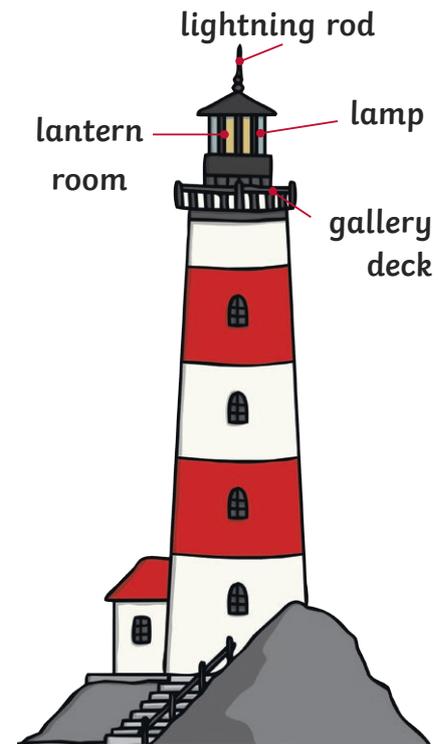
A Lighthouse

There are over 100 lighthouses around the UK. Only some of these are still in use due to the expensive upkeep they require. Other navigational systems have also been invented meaning there is less purpose for a lighthouse. However, many seafarers still see a lighthouse as a symbol of hope.

Lantern Room – A room at the top of the lighthouse housing a lamp and a lens. It has glass windows so the light can project out.

Lightning Rod – Lighthouses are often subjected to storms. A copper rod on the top of the structure aims to take the lightning straight to the ground, to avoid damage.

Gallery Deck – A platform that circles the lighthouse just below the lantern room. It allows the lighthouse keeper to clean the windows as well as enabling them to look out to sea.



Lamp – Where the light comes from. In the past, this may have been oil burning or a candle. Technological advances have provided electricity supplies to lighthouses.

Lighthouse Keeper – A lighthouse keeper was somebody who tended to the lighthouse, ensuring the light kept burning and the windows were cleaned. The last manned lighthouse in the UK was in 1998.

Questions

1. Why do you think lighthouses are sometimes on a raised stand?

2. Find and copy another word which means sailor.

3. Why do you think some countries call a lighthouse a Pharos?

4. 'The first lighthouse was an octagonal structure'. What does the word 'octagonal' mean in this sentence?

5. How are sea farers warned of danger?

5. In your opinion, why do some seafarers still view lighthouses as a symbol of hope?
