

LIGHTHOUSES OF THE SOUTH WEST

A definitive guide from Avonmouth to Swanage

Robin Jones

Few of the world's coastlines can boast not only as many lighthouses at that of south-west England, but their sheer variety in terms of shape, size, design and ancestry. For millennia, the sheer cliffs with jagged rocks at their feet facing the full force of the Atlantic surge showed no mercy as generations of sailors attempted to navigate the major trade route. Fiercest of all was the rounding of Land's End, the extreme south-westernmost point of the British mainland, overlooking the great expanse where three seas meet – the Atlantic, the English Channel and Irish Sea, and producing the great swell which would never hesitate in tossing ships like corks on the ocean, so often sending them to their doom on the isolated pinnacles of Wolf Rock, the Longships or the Seven Stones reef.

Today, lighthouses have become automated and – with the advent of modern navigation systems – some are under threat of closure altogether. However, lighthouses have become an integral part of the British seaside landscape, and are much admired by locals and visitors alike. They have inspired paintings, books, poems, and songs. In some cases, like Burnham-on-Sea, they have not only contributed to the safety of a port or harbour, but played a key role in its development.

This book is a definitive tour of the lighthouses ancient and modern along the coast from Avonmouth around Land's End to Swanage and, for completeness, includes lightships and also the major daymarks – lightless beacons to guide ships during daytime. Heavily illustrated, it is a fascinating guide which can be enjoyed on the ground – or in the comfort of the armchair!



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

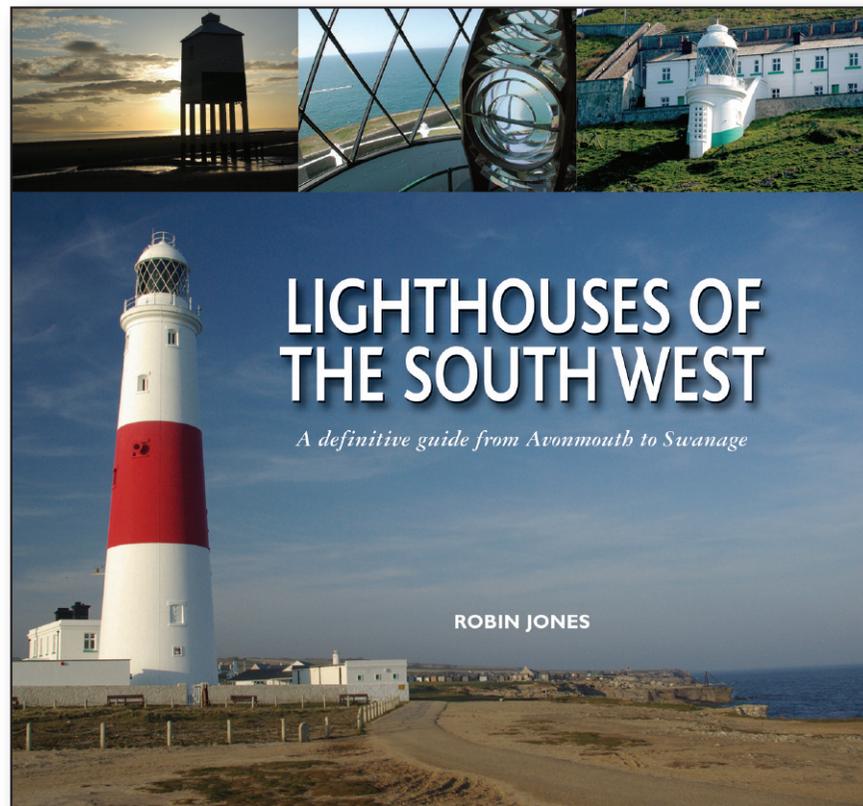
A graduate of the University of Central England, Robin Jones, founding editor of *Heritage Railway* magazine, was a news editor and chief investigative reporter at the *Birmingham Evening Mail*. Over the years he has produced several books and special publications, along with historical features for numerous other newspapers and periodicals.

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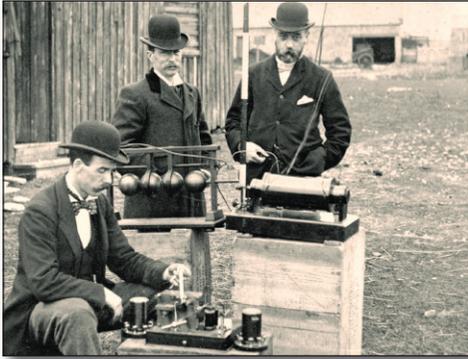


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LIGHTHOUSES OF THE SOUTH WEST



Post office engineers check Marconi's Equipment in 1897. FLAT HOLM PROJECT



Above: The daymark on top of Gribben Head. DARREN SHILSON

Left: Lynmouth Foreland lighthouse, perched mid-way down an Exmoor cliff. JOHN LUCAS

Below: Example of a double-page spread.



Above: The distinctive 'lighthouse on stilts' which stands in the middle of Burnham's sandy beach. ROBIN JONES

Below: Newlyn South Pier lighthouse, with the Ordnance Survey tidal observatory next to it, and St Michael's Mount on the other side of Mount's Bay in the background. ROGER HOLLINGSWORTH

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trade. As a counter measure, engineer William Jessop designed a dam and dock at Horwells, effectively creating Bristol's Floating Harbour, so ships could stay afloat at all states of the tide.

Yet ships and their cargo continued to increase in size, and the advent of the railways led to the building of a new harbour on the Severn in the west.

Avonmouth Old Dock was opened in 1877 and acquired by Bristol Corporation in 1884. In 1908, the much larger Royal Edward Dock was opened.

The docks were operated by the Port of Bristol Authority, part of Bristol City Council, until 1991. The council then granted a 150-year lease to the Bristol Port Company, which now operates the docks together with Royal Parkbury Dock, a deepwater terminal built between 1972-77 near Parkbury on the opposite bank of the Avon.

The first lighthouse at Avonmouth preceded the docks. Erected by Trinity House in 1839, its octagonal cast-iron tower built of some steel 85ft high. Known as Aven lighthouse, its traditional lens when light was lit by oil. The first light was shown on 21 May 1840, and was visible for 24 miles.

AVONMOUTH

Far left: The modern light inside the South Pier lighthouse's Fresnel lens. BRISTOL PORT COMPANY

Left: The interior of the South Pier lighthouse's Fresnel lens. BRISTOL PORT COMPANY

The South Pier lighthouse. BRISTOL PORT COMPANY

It was pulled down in 1992 to make way for the Royal Edward Dock. Until that opened, Avonmouth was served by a temporary wooden lighthouse.

The present lighthouses were constructed in 1908 from Norwegian granite, on completion of the Royal Edward Dock.

Both lights are still operational, although not using their original equipment. The North Pier lighthouse, which is 53ft tall, and originally had a wooden lighthouse keeper's hut alongside, is lit by a white LED on a crystal in the gallery, but there is no longer an operational light contained within the Fresnel lens workings.

It has a focal plane of 50ft; a focal plane, by the way, is the standard means of 'measuring' lighthouses. It indicates the distance from the wavy's surface to the middle of the optic.

The South Pier lighthouse, which stands at nearly 20ft high, and has a focal plane of 50ft, is a second and odd glass light using a modern Phosor LED light. A fog signal bell is still operational.

The Avonmouth lighthouses each have a range of 10 nautical miles. Neither piers nor the lighthouses are publicly accessible.

Since the Bristol Port Company took over in 1991, the company's investment of more than £400 million has made it one of the most technologically advanced operators in Europe, handling much larger ships than its competitors elsewhere in southern England.

