

Loch Traignarry Light

by Mark Reep

Built in 1817 by Scottish coal magnate Thomas Dain to ensure safe passage of his barges, the Loch Traignarry Light was also intended as a model of innovation, with a coal-burning lamp fed by a chain-driven conveyor drawing on coal bins built near the waterline. When this proved impracticable, Dain reluctantly ordered the installation of the oil-burning Argand lamp widely in use at the time. This lamp served until 1822, when Dain purchased one of the first Fresnel refracting lenses to become available. In 1871, the lighthouse was fitted with the revolutionary Holmes magneto-electro arc light.

In 1874, a fire caused by an apparent lightning strike damaged the tower and destroyed the adjoining wood-framed keeper's cottage. The longtime lightkeeper, his wife and granddaughter all escaped unharmed, but the keeper's logs, dating from the lamp's first lighting, were lost. When the keeper's wife insisted their new cottage be built at what she considered a safe remove, Thomas Dain agreed, commissioning a local architect to design a two-story home some 120 meters inland. This project was Dain's last; following a site visit on a blustery spring day in 1875, he contracted pneumonia and died before construction was completed. Three months later, Thomas Dain II dedicated the new keeper's house, naming it in memory of his father.

In 1903 a compressed-air foghorn was installed atop the light. The horn sounded nightly until 1937, when it was replaced by a radio beacon broadcasting Morse code. In 1967, the light was automated. In 1989, following a review by the Northern Lighthouse Board, the light was decommissioned, and fell into neglect for nearly a decade. In 1998, the light and keeper's house were purchased by the Traignarry Light Preservation Society, who began the task of repair and restoration.

This rendering for a fundraising campaign finds the disused coal bins overgrown, the steps of the waterstair crumbling. But the tower's stonework has been repointed, its ironwork and glazing replaced, and the blackened foundations of the original keeper's cottage, just inland of the light proper, now bound a small wildflower garden. The Traignarry Light Preservation Society meets monthly at the Thomas Dain house, and welcomes visitors and volunteers.

- from *A History of Loch Traignarry Light*, Thomas Dain Estate, publisher. Used by permission.

