



## Lighthouses at St Catherine's

### The First Lighthouse – St Catherine's Oratory (*The Pepperpot*)

Over the centuries many ships have been wrecked along the south coast of the Island and there was no distinction by those who chose to plunder those wrecks. From the poorest to the gentry, if the cargo was salvageable it was fair game. However, on 20th April 1313, the sailing vessel *St Marie* out of Bayonne, ran aground on the Atherfield Ledge with a cargo of wine bound for the monastery of Livers in Picardy. The wine was plundered by the Lord of Chale, Walter de Godeton, and as a penance, the Pope ordered him to build a chapel and light tower on the hilltop in an attempt to warn future ships, which he duly did. The Oratory (*shown here*) is an octagonal tower, and it is the only surviving medieval lighthouse in Britain. It was originally attached to one end of the chapel (which has since disappeared). After the Reformation (c 1530) the tower was no longer manned and became purely used as a seamark. It is known colloquially as *The Pepperpot*.



### The Second Lighthouse (*The Saltpot*)

A few hundred yards away is the second attempt at a lighthouse – locally known as *The Saltpot*, and started in 1785. It was never completed as it was realised that its position, on the second highest point on the Island, was too high to be effective due to coastal fog and mist at the lower levels.

### The Third Lighthouse

In 1838 it was decided to construct a lighthouse (*see second photo here*) on land at St Catherine's Point. It was an elegant three-tier octagonal structure 130 feet tall and, incidentally, the same planform [outline when viewed from above] as the Oratory. A fog signal house was built nearer to the sea, although it was always going to be susceptible to erosion of the cliff edge. After several years of service, it was apparent that the new lighthouse still suffered from low clouds preventing the light being seen by shipping, so some reduction in height was needed.

### The Fourth and Final Lighthouse

In 1875 the lighthouse was reduced in height to 43 feet, which is as we know it today. Thirteen years after the height reduction, in 1888, St Catherine's became the first lighthouse in the world to be powered by electric arc lamps which could be seen up to eighteen miles away! In 1932, as the foghorn tower was getting dangerously close to the cliff edge, it was moved to a purpose-built tower adjacent to the main tower. However, with improved radar and new satellite technology being introduced, the foghorn was switched off in 1987.

### Tragedy

During the Second World War, in response to an imminent air raid, three keepers took refuge in an outbuilding but, unfortunately, that outbuilding itself took a direct hit and, sadly, they were all killed. Ironically, the lighthouse itself was not seriously damaged, and was not put out of action. In 1997 the lighthouse became fully automatic, dispensing with resident keepers. It is still operational and is a very popular Trinity House tourist attraction all year around.

