



## The Lighthouse Keeper A day in the Life

In softest echo and muffled beep, I am awakened from my shallow sleep  
Anticipating that very call! It's a wonder how I sleep at all  
Accustomed and by ritual seed refreshed in body by slumbers need  
My motions slow and gentle take, while sleeping Mags, am careful not to  
awake  
I dress in darkness yet know my style, my clothes on dresser neatly piled.  
Shirt and jumper left till last, washed and ready for my watch.

Just as quietly as before, I open out the double door, closing soft and  
handle gripped on well oiled hinge in jam it slips  
The moon is full on this summer's morn, yet two hours will pass until the  
dawn.  
In competition to light my way, I look above and the beam cut swathe.  
No sound of engines breaks the still, or foghorn blasts the air to fill.

Not satisfied with that omission I look towards the Irish Sea, all  
dominions are in sight and clear proof of visibility.  
I make my way to tower door where watch-room lies beyond in the  
crescent of a quarterdeck with Keeper waiting on my form.  
Ron Ireland is sitting in the chair and with casual comments make,  
Nowt of note had happened, so tis now the chair I take.

The light will shine and turn without aid of keeper's hand,  
We are here to tend her needs and when fogs within four miles of land  
Till quarter to the approaching hour there is little else to do, so I into my  
dwelling go, a cuppa for to brew.  
I return with it and from the shelf select a favoured book, with half a  
dozen pages read its time to take a look.

I stroll out with pen and pad in hand toward the lighthouse green  
Where close to wall in ground is placed a rain gauge and a Screen  
Wet and dry thermometers have measures to be taken, with no rain the  
gauge is empty and its bottle left forsaken.  
In skywards glance and octaves see all cloud its type and cover,  
what height the lowest cloud and if precipitation is to follow.

Cotton balls of cumulus drift idly on the breeze that gently blows from west to east across the Irish Sea.

The visibility at maximum in figures do I write, with full moon's searchlight beam, you would scarcely think it night.

As I cast my eyes in Southward glance toward the Isle of Man, the tail of Tats our lighthouse Cat brushes gently against my hand.

He purrs quite loudly and in cheeky style teases me to pet him for a while  
He follows me to the watch-room door and enters at a gait, sitting comfortably on the window ledge for my figures all to calculate.

In groups of five I enter them across a two-page ledger

Awaiting passage by telephone to the MOD collators.

Just as bell begins to ring, Tats in motion stirs, he leaps across as if to answer and loudly starts to purr.

He paces back and forward until it's hard to read, he knows that when I'm finished I will take him home to feed.

Time for another cuppa, but tis coffee that I'll make, then back to the watch-room and the book again uptake.

The eastward sky is lightening with every moment passing; soon that golden globe of dawn will be breaking the horizon

By the time the stairs to light-room tread the Sun has risen from her bed  
Above the Solway and peaks she'll rise and be forecast for our lights demise.

As switches to the left I turn, the halogen headlights no longer burn; it is the momentum now that turns the table; now frictions grasp makes it less able

An age has passed since lenses here needed curtains to be drawn,  
For solar glare and combustibles in the light-room burn

My work up here is done except to sweep the floor, its other work that's on the cards, so it will be one less chore.

From now till six I am idle save for watching out for fog

With little prospect of that happenstance, I'll go and walk the dog.

Tats is sleeping soundly with Mags upon the bed, but Kelly hears my footfalls and raises up her head.

She sometimes has no notion to leave the house at all, but once her lead is in my hands then her thoughts of sleep there's no recall.

The grounds are vast enough to wander at leisurely a pace, so Kelly is as free to roam with rabbits for to chase.

There is but one thing left to do till the end of my watch at six.  
More readings will I have to take with max and min temperatures to add  
into the mix.  
I will have the chair till Ken Clark he doth appear; he is the Principal  
Keeper yet not a man to fear.  
As affable a character as I have ever seen, he's the oil for the machinery  
and the rag to keep it clean.

We sometimes chat for half an hour before I drift away, encouraged to get  
a bit more sleep for the rigours of the day.  
Ken has planned some painting and some summer work to fix; Ron is on  
his day off and returns tomorrow night at six.  
It's Ron's turn for the School run down the hill to Tarbert's shore,  
where Jackie Shank's mini bus takes them onward to Drummore.

Margaret gives me gentle stir at twenty five to nine, refreshed by coffee  
and a bite to eat, I'll be ready and on time.  
She's prepared for me elevenses for when I have my break, both she and  
Gavin are Stranraer bound our weekly shopping trip to take.  
The girls will be at School by now, so in peace I know I'll find, to do  
what ever tasks that Ken has on his mind.

Besides myself and Ken, Jock Binnie's here to work, relieving Ken Clark  
early instead of twelve o'clock.  
Jock does not keep in the best of health but is fit to stand a watch,  
allowing other keepers to do the other work.  
With brush in hand and pot of paint, I walk the foghorn's path;

A steep incline down gravelled slope and handrail for to grasp  
The horn house door and window are darkest shade of green, but before I  
dip my brush in paint, the dirt I'll have to clean.  
My companions unseen to do this task yet loudly are they heard  
kittiwakes and fulmars cry on rocks above the sound of surf.

My toils are interrupted by a visitor's approach, in questioning, "Is that  
penguins sitting pruning?" not our familiar auks.  
His accent and his ignorance is plain for all to hear, he hails from south of  
Durban in the southern hemisphere  
But that is common at the Mull and I don't mean lack of knowledge  
But visitors from around the world to see this point of homage.

For Scotland's southern most tip of land and vistas come to see;  
And to stop the keepers from their work as happened then to me.  
Margaret's labours will go untouched till the moment I have finished  
then I will down tools for the day, till my watch at six begineth  
Half the afternoon has passed till Mags is back at home, while she puts  
away the shopping, I'll take Gavin for a roam.

He toddles now quite happily yet prefers to take my hand, especially over  
bumpy bits; where on padded bum he lands.  
We head out to the cattle grid where he has his favoured place, he wants  
to see old Doris, well I think that's what he said  
We cross the barred obstruction to see what lies before us, a heard of  
cattle gently graze and one humungus Taurus.

Before excitement takes control and in our direction brings him  
I hastily beat a safe retreat the way that we have taken.  
Karen and Kirsty home from school are ready for their tea, they tell us  
what they'd done today with varying degrees of glee.  
Karen is the quiet one, Kirsty full of vigour, our cherished daughters  
proud we are in all that they endeavour.

I'll not see the news at six tonight on any tele station; Jock is looking for  
relief and that is my vocation.  
While fog abates and weather's fine I'll have nowt to do till close to nine;  
then once more those readings take for the meteorology forecasts make.  
I climb the stairs at twenty to ten to turn the switches to on again

Jimmy Fyffe is my relief and he is always early, so we chat a while over  
local news till the banter makes me weary.  
This has been a quiet day and in balmy weather should remain that way.  
But the reason for our presence here, means that it is not always so  
In winter storm and howling gales, with fog so thick to hide the way to go  
But I have done my duty and now am off to bed; to rise at six and begin  
another day I'll need to rest my not so tired head.

**The Commissioners of Northern Lighthouses**  
*In Salutem Omnium*  
**For the Safety of All**

It began when good old Georgie three sat on the throne in London;  
beleaguered by his Board of trade to end a national conundrum  
Why ships had foundered and were destroyed by rocks that they had hit,  
when night obscured the hazard because it was not lit.

Around the coast of Britain were many notable places, where shipping  
was lost annually if not on regular basis.

It was now becoming costlier to ship things round the coast, so  
Government passed law, creating lights where they were needed most.

It was noted, that though Union brought together State and Crown, the  
laws in Scotland differed, so too burden should be bound.

The Commissioners from all coastal shires judiciary were taken, so  
too the Lords Provosts of the City's so as not to be forsaken.

Their task was to establish and there to oversee, the building of four  
lighthouses by command of Kings decree.

The first was at Kinnaird Head by Frazerburgh Port; she was built by  
adding tower to the pre-existing fort

The second was North Ronaldsay, one of Orcades northern isles; to mark  
a safer passage twixt her and the Fairest Isle

The third was on Hebridean Isle that bears the name of Glas, just south of  
Harris's mighty bulk on Minches leeward pass

The fourth was on Kintyre's land, right at its very tip; a sentinel for the  
North Channel and its currents raging grip

Nobly was the effort made and achievements so resounding; that more  
lights were then commissioned with buildings more astounding.

They were feats of engineering that tested mortal souls; none more so  
than The Bell Rock and the difficulties that it posed.

As Lighthouses grew in number for their stature to improve, was such a  
daily burden till a Board it was approved.

The Family Stevenson became the engineers to the Board; and for  
generations their craftsmanship has been a sight unto behold.

From the start there was a problem finding men to man the lights, yet  
they came from mariners and fishermen accustomed to the plight  
One score years plus three has passed since Bicentenary, but long gone  
were the Stevensons who made its history  
Gone too are the Keepers the last in ninety eight, their spirits haunt every  
light-room though silent is their gait  
Progress is the Sire of History of that there is no doubt, one day will come  
when they are needed not and their lights will all go out.

## *Star of the Four Kingdoms*

Like a beckoning finger come hither, meet thy doom, ye mariners  
of old

My rocks await your careless gait or stormy tempest seas unfold  
No kindly welcome to Scotia's soil, or gentle rolling surf  
But surging tides and jagged cliffs a topped by heather, grass and  
turf

They built me tall, they built me well,  
my whiteness stands as sentinel  
In daylight hours my shapely form now welcomes all to Scotia

And in the darkness of the night,  
my purpose truly comes to light  
Benevolent flash to guide them passed and safely on wherever  
Like a Nelsons patch I 'm blinded by my neighbour's fretful plea  
that was done of purpose so I should see them not and they see  
nought of me

My sweep takes me round the Bay of Luce and Wigtown's kinder  
shores  
then gently on to Solway Firth till she passes out of view

On clearest days the Lakeland Fells and peaks  
my eye can see, at night my brother lights flash dimly  
if Brethren Lights they be  
My sister at the Point of Ayre has bands of red and white;  
she shows the same in flashes in the stillness of the night  
but all that distance can reveal to me is a single flash of light  
My beam sweeps on in gentle scan to Peel that marks the end of  
Man

I linger just a little while, on the fertile lands of the Emerald Isle  
till blindness comes once more as silvery sea gives way  
to land on Scotia's rugged shore  
Four score years I stood alone, yet flawed by this omission  
My light and form were concealed by fog till they came to this  
admission

A trumpeter or Herald's host could not announce us better  
Even if its sound forlorn and from your slumber wakes and dreams  
all scatter

there was no better sounding Horn,  
but alas once more I stand alone  
Three graceful Queens have passed me by  
and Two who's Majesty gazed on me  
sadly Belfast's Pride I've seen making passage to her destiny  
To all my charges great or small and to those sons of earth who  
tended me,  
I am simply known as ...Star... The Light of the Mull of Galloway

Killantringan Lighthouse  
Discontinued 2007

Standing guardian to the channel  
separating Scotia from the Ulster Coast ;  
a strip of land they call the Rhinns  
lies prostrate like a maiden - her back towards the west.  
At her head is Corsewall Point,  
at her feet the lofty Mull.  
I am somewhere in between  
where spine opposes Belfast Lough.

Towering twins that stand at either end  
in slender elegance made sleeker by their solitude,  
While I in obscurity - save from the ships that pass  
and my seaward neighbours eastward glance  
I may not shine as brightly  
but my worth remains the same,  
Unless of course you count the time ;  
when Craigtlet crashed into my skirts,  
In that I share no blame!

There was no one at the helm you see;  
and like Mary Celeste she sailed blindly  
on till water filled the gaping hole  
Where rocks had stopped her in her track;  
a mortal wound that tore at her soul  
and broke in twain her back.  
She died a death through ignorance, in that she shares no shame.

Blind reliance on modern technology,  
She obediently plotted Liverpool bound.  
A vigilant watch upon her bridge,  
And she would not have run aground  
But such a legacy made me orphaned  
By the corpse she left behind.  
Abandoning me for fear of toxic cargo  
that lay strewn about the waterline.

When my tenders were restored to me,  
once more I was made whole  
Of course I always had my light and horn  
but function better with a human soul.  
Time and progress go hand-in-hand at least that's what they say  
Will Craigentlet's fate befall me too when my keepers are withdrawn?  
Or will I simply diminish like twilight  
To be replaced by another light at dawn  
Till that time I will shine  
For whoever needs me most  
That ivory tusk, between sibling towers  
On the rugged Galloway Coast

## Sule Skerry Lighthouse

Sule as in booby or gannet, Skerry as in rocky isle I'm a Lighthouse in the Pentland Firth could the solitude tempt you to stay a while? Take pity on my loneliness, for it was not always so; how I miss the men who tended me; how sad to see them go.

No booby's nest in my rocks and hollows, but their guano litters a nearby stack

It's puffins nesting deep in burrows that call like puppies crying from a sack

They waddle with their heads held low; to dodge the Skua's lethal blow  
This rocky outcrop on which I stand makes me the furthest from the haunts of man

Passing ships were once a many, but Pentland has little in the way of quays

Larger ships avoid the dangerous passage between the islands, skerries and roughest seas. I see them at a distance towards the Lewis Isle and passing by the Cape of Wrath

I beg and plead them tarry "come Stay a little while".

But even though my light is warm and my welcome warmer still, they have much better things to do than bend unto my will. I sometimes wish some tempest would cast a crew adrift so that I could fulfil my other task just to give my heart a lift

My desire to be needed overrides my true compassion...."For the safety of all is my motto", and I was created in that fashion. Time and Tide wait for no man and that applies to me; some day man will forget me and I will be left to crumble into the sea.

## Ruvaal Lighthouse

Beyond the Sound of Jura and between it's comely Paps  
In northerly progression take, till Sound of Islay laps  
Across the ten-knot current that fia rua use as route  
For island hopping when the rutting season comes about.  
Ahead a solitary Lighthouse stands where no track or road was laid  
In Gaelic; Rubh Mhail... Rough Headland leaves little to be said.  
Pencil thin in slenderness and none to match her equal  
A challenge, for her keepers to retain an upright stance  
For to miss a step and balance loose as gravity and momentum take  
control, escalating at breakneck speed, till the buffer of a wall does  
intercede.  
McArthur's Head her sister lies at the opposing end of Sound.  
Invisible to each other but in duty both are bound.  
Guiding weekend mariners through this Hebridean pass  
Avoiding Corryvreckan's tides should it drag them or their ass-under, to  
their mass  
Twice weekly Cal Mac's passengers give wave in friendly jest  
Believing Keepers wave in return, not hikers; Ruvaal's only guests.  
They come by way of whisky trail and when they've had a few  
Blissful in their ignorance when there's nothing left to view  
They stay a while to sober up and return from whence they came  
Passing by the same distillery that began their walk of shame.  
Some call it an elixir, to the locals... uisge beah.  
But the unfortunate hikers with a drouth would find no succour here.  
So if ever you are passing raise a glass and give a toast  
To the shadowy figure waving for he is a friendly keepers Ghost.

## Barra Head Lighthouse

I'm Barra Head or Berneray what e'r you favour most,  
I'm the dot of the exclamation mark  
that's the Hebridean chain from Lewis's northern coast  
My loftiness is not from stature built but height above the seas,  
and often fog obscures my feet  
like the portly man whose manhood he seldom sees

On clearest nights I join the stars as in the days of old,  
Where Norse and Gael's would navigate by skyward glance  
For want of better passage to behold.  
I will argue my right to stand, the highest in the realm,  
for Old Lundy is shorter by a measure of six fathoms.  
And in low cloud he's overwhelmed

His two companions took his place and left him but a cairn  
But in my solitude I stand alone and proud  
irreplaceable save for man's invention.  
Where the feet of man once trod and tended to my need  
The Barrachs secured a home, where they  
Graze a herd of nomad sheep brought here on grass to feed

I am the owner of all I see, in that there is no doubt,  
for if what you see is what you love,  
then as I stand I will want for nowt

## Holburn Head Lighthouse

I'm the modest kind of lighthouse with not really much to say  
I do not have a graceful tower like my sister across the bay  
She shows off her shapely figure on promontory stand,  
like the catwalk of some modelling house she makes herself so grand

That is not her claim to fame though for in records she's another  
As the most northerly point on the mainland of England Wales and Scotia  
In contrast I am rather plain and on no headland stand  
Still that could be a blessing because I am so bland

I look more like a folly with whimsical mistakes  
That is until my light is lit; then the joking all abates  
So I have a useful purpose and one in which I'm proud.  
Even if I'm not the brightest light or am not so booming loud

There was a time not so long ago when I was favoured by the best,  
When she went to her residence just a few miles up the coast  
Her regal daughter on The Royal Yacht was anchored in the bay  
Till Mamma left the home she loved, Known to us as Mey

I'm favoured too by Orcadians on ferries homeward bound  
They know that when they pass me by they'll soon be safe and sound  
Beauty is not everything just so long as you have use  
So tonight I'll give my sister a friendly flash and call upon a truce

## Inchkeith Lighthouse

I stand proudly on an Island twixt Kirkcaldy and Port of Leith  
And though the latter nearer be it is to Fife that I'm bequeathed  
The rock of my foundations has been fought for over years  
On fortress ruins they were laid and in bastion style just to allay those  
fears.

My bicentenary has come and gone with no one here to care  
I am happy so long as my light shines for passing ships to make aware

This island has seen royalty but has also seen the poor  
The noble and destitute alike as plague takes them to deaths door  
Man has always trod her paths and in her soil interred  
Till over time and weathering; their bones become unearthed  
The fortress once was garrisoned by the French and was home to Russian  
crew  
Poor souls with a dreadful illness, awaiting their last adieu

I am not painted white and some would say my lines were less than clean  
But Sandstone does the job just as well, when myopic helmsmen are so  
few and far between.

But just in case I am concealed in mist that shrouds my standing  
they put a fog horn on the north just to warn the ships of grounding  
My symbolic ramparts were made forlorn  
The day my Keepers were withdrawn

Scholars and academics argue to this day that age-old local poser  
How long is the Forth? That's the Question they will ponder  
Do they consider time and tide or tributary factors?  
A simple man will find the truth and that is all what matters  
The answer lies in the here and now and not what's in the past  
She's greater than Four Inches and I am the First or Last

## Ailsa Craig

There is a granite plug of a volcano long since dead  
Like Christmas Pud in a choppy sea, with lush grass to crown her dome-  
like head.

Every aspect from which she's seen, she shows a different face  
Like Mata Hari concealing her identity yet revealing in her grace

On one face granite columns mimic Staffa's famous trait  
Where Solan geese on ridge and crevice their partners they await  
Yet their offspring they abandon when they feel the time is right  
And one by one the juveniles make tentative first flight

I am blind to this activity because of where I Stand  
Her bulk is all behind me on my granite littered strand  
All I see is the Ayrshire coast from Ballantrae to Bute  
just a little bit of Corsewall point and my sister so astute

I see Goat Fell on the Arran Isle and all its other peaks  
And at night my sister Pladda in flashes to me greets  
I am bonded close with Turnberry for we share both fame and favour  
To golfers from around the world, the course for them to savour

It's the mass that sporting golfers see for daylight is their time  
Unless from Hotel windows see my flashing light to shine  
Once I could be seen and heard if the breeze it was to follow  
Like a gang of Louis Armstrongs my horn sounded though really not as  
mellow

Modern high speed ferries sometimes take the eastern route  
From Troon to Northern Ireland if the captain so to suit  
They have hardly time to see me before their here and gone  
I wonder if they glance my way and know that I'm alone

Seven graceful sisters shine for mariners to guide  
Yet when our keepers were withdrawn a part of us just died  
Whether I see or not those on the western side  
We are all still sentinels and guardians of the Clyde

## Rhinns of Islay Lighthouse

My Island's name is Orsay but my Lighthouse name is Rhinns  
There can be no confusion though when my rotating light begins.  
Approaching vessels from the west can see my guiding light  
And know the North Channel lies before them with Ireland on their right  
Like all the Hebridean Isles who are outposts of the nation  
I am a welcome sight for mariners who have braved Atlantic's storm  
abrasions  
My mainland neighbours bicker over title to my soil  
But neither likes the raging current to cross for which they'd have to toil  
Portnahaven and Port Wemyss like playground school-girls rant  
Over who is fairer, cleaner, better and from here I hear them chant  
The Ilead council thought them to unite in praise of our dear Lord  
So they built a church between them for peace to be restored  
Yet they continued arguing over common entrance door  
Till both agreed to have one each with separate pews and floor  
I turn my back on both of them and neither do I see  
And have much better things to do so they better not bother me  
So long as I have useful purpose fulfilling the tasks of my creation  
Guardians from the N.L.B will save me from their deliberation  
In ardent belief and fervent hope, to all people, I am a treasure  
A monument for the National Trust to care and protect forever

## *Saints & Angels*

A trilogy of poems commemorating the Bicentenary of the building of the  
Bell Rock Lighthouse

The first tells the fictitious but never-the-less realistic reasons why the  
Inchcape or Bell Rock needed a lighthouse built on it.

To dream of building a lighthouse in such an inhospitable a placed not  
only required the vision in which undertake such an incredible feat of  
engineering but the determination of the Commissioners of Northern  
Lighthouses to somehow find the funds for such a project.

All the characters and the vessel the Elspeth Grey is purely imaginary so I  
will apologise if the names upset any readers.

The building of the Bell Rock is historically accurate but the character of  
the narrator is once again pure fiction, but I wanted this story to be as told  
by one of the unsung heroes who helped on such a noble enterprise.

Captain Reid was indeed the first principle keeper of the Bell Rock but as  
for the other two keepers; they once more are pure fiction.

Perhaps the Northern Lighthouse Board will have records of their names  
and perhaps they might also be able to throw light ( if you will excuse the  
pun) on what the Lighthouse service did in protection from the threat of  
attack from the French otherwise my accounts would seem quite  
plausible.

*Saints and Angels*  
The sinking of the Elspeth Grey

Two days out and two to go, progressed slowed  
by a tempest thrown by Thor's great hand checks our course.  
Tyne was left in the glowing embers of an autumnal dusk  
that gave lie to the Shepherd's promise of fair passage.  
I stand this watch with helmsman and like kinsmen  
tied and bound the mighty wheel.  
Brothers standing firm gainst the strife of storms creation  
We sink or swim together; though neither thought has but a moments  
fleeting  
as we battle natures wrath.

Our Captain grasping what e're he can  
casting skyward glances at the set of sails  
as equally on the tempests progress;  
looking for the slightest clue on its abatement.  
He was loath to surrender and head for the shelter of Forth's comely bays.  
And the owner's of this well rigged barque did not pay to see her languish  
or struck idle and though in part by investment made our Captain's  
power over life and limb could n'er to better judgement be attested.  
He presses onward come what may.

The sails are full and the yards scream out;  
all crew save for the mess-deck boys have joined the fight  
and there is comfort in the camaraderie that still abounds  
given the nature of the ever present threat.  
The Elspeth Grey of hearty oak was fashioned for such a purpose;  
to what e're heaven or hell had in mind to throw in her course.  
New from the yard and blessed by Royal blood  
even if such blood was tainted and watered by the passing flow of time  
its symbolism and patronage counted for so much

Yet had her shipwright's given her eyes and soul;  
then she would have chosen better path  
regardless of the whims of men  
and the forlorn paces on the quarterdeck.  
The only eyes that can see any hazard that may lie before us;  
belong to my young nephew whom I'd begged  
in his sixteenth year to join our band o' brothers.  
Three years have passed and blessed years they be  
his majesty's pressgangs have left him alone.

In stature and in promise swelled  
to the rank of bos'uns mate,  
his keen and youthful eyes followed by a hearty and well-timed cry;  
are all that stand between an onward passage or dining in the depths with  
Mr Jones.

How the lad can see at all as wind swept rain lashes salt,  
whipped cat-like into the faces of all who's duty calls upon them  
to embrace the torment of natures punishment  
Not free to turn in shelter with their backs  
but encumbered by a burden with hands not free to shield

Tis not with Neptunes tears that soak my skin, but labour at the helm  
As with my brother helmsman we fight the rudder to obey all Masterly  
commands  
A cry of "Shoals!" and "Shoals!" like gulls cry on the wind  
Then again in fervent plea from crows nest down to quarterdeck;  
followed closely by the Masters cry of "hard a lee!"-, "hard a lee!"  
Just so none are in doubt to note the import of what danger lies before us.  
An age it seems to pass before the great wheel moves,  
yet her stubbornness relaxes, more so when

the Master in the light of all the perils joins us at the helm.  
At last the wheel it moves with ease.  
The sails are limp and the rudder at the mercy of the tide;  
but direction and way had to be curtailed in the speediest o' manners  
Lest we meet my nephew's prophetic bane in more hastily a fashion.  
All cries of "shoals" have now ceased  
I glance heavenward to see both nest and chick are gone  
as we turned our beam to broadside a third of the main was lost.  
No time to mourn the boy I loved my tasks were still a plenty,

the loss of main and progress were but forecasts for our doom;  
as broaching almost stern first came sounds to wrench a sailor's heart  
as oak was torn apart by rock. We foundered in the blink of eye  
so sudden our demise; no time to see our Captain fall  
as yard and rigging gathered him up and cast him from his charge  
the barque that bore the name of his beloved's; divorcing in a moment  
both  
as wind and tide dragged him from our side.  
No time to hear the cries of my fellow crew as each by fates  
attachment made them follow their master down below

No time to worry about my fate for surely I would follow?  
I thought to have some company on my journey to another realm  
But alas the helmsman's hand and arm were still tied  
to the wheel that we were bound.  
My tethers had all but withered and barely left a trace.  
Two days immersed in salty brine had left wrinkles in their place.  
I was found by Cutters crew lashed to a decking grate,  
she was sent out from Arbroath when the tide  
had washed some wreckage on a nearby beach

"Inchcape claims another ship," the local papers said  
but the words that will haunt me the most  
was the adage "Sole Survivor, second mate".  
That filled my eyes more bitterly than any sea on earth  
My mind cast back to the friends I'd lost and a boy that I held dear.  
There was nothing but his treasured cap to take home to his mother;  
there were only words of condolence that I could give my brother.  
As mariner-to-mariner we hug and share our grief.  
As fine a ship and as fine a crew were lost upon that reef.

*Saints and Angels*  
The Building of Bell Rock Lighthouse

I am of good fisher stock like the kinsfolk all before me  
Our daily battle with the sea to land what bounty lord provides  
The North Sea is such an unforgiving place where nets are cast and laid  
And in our prayers; hope that the yields are equal to our efforts made.  
The war with France takes heavy toll  
When pressgangs make so dearthly a patrol  
Widows and orphans come cheaply like the price shot and grape  
Then in the barrels bottom with nothing more to scrape  
Old men and young boys scarce strong enough to land the meagre catch.

A new century is upon us yet I fear we'll fare no better  
And even weathered wrecks like me will take King Georges shilling  
Yet fortune spares me from that plight as I open up a letter  
An important pressing of a different kind with words to make me willing  
I am noted for my seamanship and knowledge of the hazard  
For none knows the Inchcape better.  
Save for the poor souls that sleep within her depths.  
To Robert Stevenson I will answer when I land him on the reef  
Of his youth and skills I've heard much but I have yet to see his measure

He is going to survey the reef to build a lighthouse on  
What kind of madman is this Robert Stevenson  
Does he sample he the amber liquid that flows so freely hereabouts,  
but barely does the Cape stand high enough to land a boat  
let alone for long enough to build anything upon it.  
I'll give him his due for I have seen his light at Frazerburgh Port  
and it still shines after a score of years but was founded on a fort  
It does not face the North Sea swells  
Or battered by ferocious gales

Yet when I take measure of my own tasks, I find that I too must be  
afflicted.

For seldom does man venture to such a place even if so gifted  
The Bo'sun of the barque from which our skiff was bound  
said "None but Saints and Angels on Inchcape tread".  
I feel no wings a sprouting nor a halo o'er my head,  
three times my feet have trod on that less than hallowed ground.  
This Rob's a man of purpose, though barely half my years,  
he stands like a cocky midshipman with his foot upon the prow.  
One hand grasps an upright oar while the other wipes his brow

The gully mouth it starts to close as swell into it fills.  
With fenders out to halt the clash with rocks  
But not protection from the boat to spill  
The movement now was over swift, I give counter to the action,  
“ Back oars “, I cry and the oars are braced,  
the forward oarsman extend the un-feathered end in a fraction  
and heave with all their might  
till stroke and boat are reversed  
to spare us from some predecessors plight

Rob gives up his careless stance for a safer standing,  
humbled by the whims of nature yet still steadfast in his ambition.  
Five times we tried and five times were repelled from landing  
Destined we were to try once more for expedition  
Or on the morrow if in weathers favour finds us better grounding  
As if by grace and favour brought a break in force of swell  
brimming with new found confidence he deftly leaps ashore  
He tippy-toes on every rock like a ballet dancer without an orchestra  
all the rocks on footfall lands as slippery as ice

We have a pair of Smithies who have fashioned mooring rings,  
should we e're return and the endeavour be undertaken.  
Robert measured every surface of this most inhospitable of places.  
Drawing every detail and every outline that he traces  
My doubts increased with every stroke that Rob marked with his pen  
For such an undertaking would need qualities rarely found in men  
The work by weather and tide's permission take,  
would make the building slow in progress make  
How ever noble a cause as this; the cost would prove too much.

It was in the year of our lord 1807 that Robert came to me.  
I had retired and spent most my time mending nets not casting them.  
Yet God had been kind and had granted me  
with the strength that younger men envied  
but not the will to continue fishing for so meagre a catch.  
So once more with the added praises of one Robert Stevenson,  
I took up the challenge just to see to fruition this young man's vision.  
Now with rank of coxswain, and new Captain too  
I was in the pay of Stevenson but part of the Pharos crew

To be retained as senior till the Lighthouse Light  
was lit by Keepers trained to do.  
Captain Reid was as mad as Rob, and not daunted by his mission  
to moor his ship within two miles of Cape,  
fool-hardy for any mariner not under commission so to do.  
Then while he was moored he must show the light.  
Naked flames and ships just do not go together, however well protected  
the threat of fire in bad weather all to present  
my task would be to act as ferryman twixt the two

The working season would be short,  
the Pharos was to keep its beacon lit  
then the Inchcape lighthouse would replace us  
and I could go back to my nets;  
I doubt that I shall be spared to see the lighting of its light.  
Or gaze upon its brilliance as the day turns swift to night  
My knowledge of the Inchcape Reef would be passed down through the  
ages  
But there's scarce the men to pass it to, though two are brought to mind  
who's worthy-ness is up to scratch should the mantle fall on them.

I watch in awe as masons chip away at rock forming a foundation  
The heavy stones that as yet were still on paper  
Or in the minds of their creators  
I see another structure built I mistook to be for the light  
It was erected at a pace before the seasons finish.  
On it a beacon was mounted and at some height  
it would provide better light than the torches used at night  
Its spindly iron legs seemed unlikely to stand a storm  
and we feared that when we returned nought would be in place

Robert a religious man though not pious to the extremes  
gave Sabbath blessings on all the crew before any work began.  
Before too long all work had ceased  
and to my other duties on Pharos I must attend.  
Next summer when our Rob returns  
the Lighthouse work resumes again.  
Yet more masons, builders and Smiths set to the task.  
A track is laid to carry stone from gully up to site,  
and derricks loading stone on bogeys like those of mining sites.

Rob looks on with pride as the work takes on a pace  
Yet the work was to be hampered as bad weather set its course  
and only twenty two days toil could be produced.  
July 10<sup>th</sup> was a momentous day as the first of the stones arrived,  
by the end of the season four courses now were laid.  
I am no engineer and I could only stand in awe  
as every surface of the stone was shaped  
locking it to it's neighbours side to side ,from above and from below.  
So the weight of stone would simply have nowhere left to go.

I am but a simple man not learned like our Rob  
but now I see his vision clear and know his wisdom right,  
for all the stresses when its built will be equal and throughout.  
My wonder at this bright young man  
and the admiration lavished on him by his crew,  
I am drawn to the Bosun's words and believe them to be true.  
For if ever Saintly or Noble deeds surpass;  
then this man's effort should in canonising find just rewards;  
Or in heaven find his grace.

The men have grown to love him and respect all of his commands  
only perfection will serve him right and that's what he demands  
the masons in Arbroath turn out work of the highest order  
No stone has been returned to them or re-fashioned so to fit  
April 1809 and work began again.  
I had misjudged old spindly for she still stands, for her beacon to be lit  
we each took wager as to how long she would last.  
Our Captain holds the purse;  
he holds it still and so now silent is our curse

The beacon became a barracks and my work lessened by degree.  
It was Rob's design for me to stay though idle I may be  
The base in stature grows to tower thirty feet,  
Yet still not safe from tempest swells that it had to meet  
By start of work in 1810, completion was not certain.  
Tremendous was the effort made that soon it was the vision  
Soon even the iron watch-room and light-room were in place  
Encompassing the all important light and lense  
capped by a big brass dome to give her added grace.

It was tears and cheers that resounded around the Inchape Reef  
The lighthouse now stood her ground defiant but as yet unlit.  
All gazes turned toward our Rob though his plaudits shore-side yet to  
come,  
it was with his beloved crew that he let his emotions slip.  
Only two men had lost their lives on this brave endeavour,  
Clasping hands gave; praise to the Lord for all his favour  
Praising too his gallant crew  
Close was the call that there were so few  
Twice I could have been in their number.

One of the boats had broke her lines  
stranding thirty men with only boats for a score.  
It looked like short straws were the order of the day  
Rob in traditional style thought it his right to stay.  
We tried to explain the custom but Rob insisted and got his way.  
I had seen many years so broke in twain my stick.  
The boats were cast away and for the Pharos bound,  
no chance for a return trip  
before the water has us in its grip.

With water lapping at our feet we prepared to meet our maker,  
then the sight of sail was heralded and we looked for our deliverance.  
The Arbroath mail boat had come just in the nick of time  
and had turned her duty into that of saviour.  
The second time though not so obvious a plight;  
was when I was standing on the platform perched high at thirty feet,  
a mischance took the grip away of a labourer on his climb.  
His last effort for a purchase he grabbed at my boot  
but then it was gone and so was he

Rob his work all finished has gone to other ventures  
I glance at his eighth wonder of the world  
and still wonder at its creation.  
I am still with Pharos till the Keepers are all trained;  
The Principal is our Captain Reid  
though quite a different quarterdeck with just a crew of two.  
I start to feel my age now but before my duties done,  
I will walk upon Inchcape's not so barren rocks,  
as token for my servitude and respect from lighthouse crew.

I take in the magnificence of the tower now before me  
and remember the first day and the sceptic sneering  
of Rob's great leap of faith as he set his foot  
and his other in engineering.

Her bell like skirt does justice for I hear that what she's called  
Bell Rock Lighthouse has ring to it, let it shine for all eternity  
As I make my way down grating to the awaiting boat  
a sudden pain racks at my chest like crushing weights upon me  
The pain subsides but darkness now encroaches and I see no.....

*Saints and Angels*  
The First Bell Rock Keepers

I hail from the town of Dalkeith and cutler was my trade  
Till one night when much the worse for drink an error I had made  
That robbed me of my freedom and my masters of their lad.  
Unworn was my glove that carried my indenture seal  
To prevent the pressgang in their over zeal  
To place the Kings shilling firmly in my hand  
And drag me from my revelry and from my native land

It was Navy swords and cutlasses that I was put to task  
Amongst other shipboard duties on the frigate “Ravenglass”  
We sailed what seemed the seven seas looking for our foe  
For months on end and no sight of land to rectify my tale of woe  
Then one day we encountered her; a Frenchman twice our size  
Our Captain’s foolish bravery sought to take her for a prize.  
With twice our crew it soon was us that met with their demise

We would languish in some Marseille gaol  
Till an exchange could be arranged  
Afore disease should shake from us our mortal coil  
Nelson and Trafalgar had made prisoners a plenty  
On “Resolute” we could recoup and homeward bound for bounty  
Freedom came at such a price for I had lost my favour  
My apprenticeship had lapsed with time the masters would not honour

So work was hard to come by without the right credentials  
Another source for income was becoming quite essential  
I might have to sign on a merchantman and return unto the sea  
and several in the Port of Leith do vie  
I read on Public notice they are looking for a crew  
To man a lighthouse off Arbroath, “Now there is something new!”  
I’ll chance my hand and go and take a view

I’m not a salty sailor and like to stand up steady  
And given what their looking for, I think that I am ready  
So following up instructions I find I’m in a queue  
Old salts and landlubbers alike who want to join the crew.  
I am on a short list, getting shorter by the day  
As one by one the candidates fall along the way  
Leaving two with letters of appointment to take away

Now that I'm selected to the "Pharos" I must go  
To meet with Captain Reid who will show us what to do  
He is Captain of the Pharos and Principal of the Light  
That is now called the Bell Rock and he will take us to the site  
It is all but finished and soon we'll be on right  
Taking months to learn our trade as Keepers of the light.  
Then on our own to face the tempests of North Sea's might

I have no fear inside it though battered she may be  
For sturdy is she crafted to face the heavy sea  
Even in depth of winter when met by howling gales  
The wind and waves may thunder like the sound of massive drums  
Crashing in to her skirts then swelling once again  
With cascades of water washing over her in our shelter from the storm  
We find more than comfortable in the dry and in the warm

Each night in turn we light the light and keep the mechanics turning  
A constant vigil we must take to ensue the light is burning  
By day the reflectors must be cleaned and wicks trimmed neat and tidy  
The stairwells swept and all the rooms till they are bright and shiny  
But if the fog that haunts these parts ventures too close to the Bell  
Then the machinery that turns the reflector will sound a bell as well.  
Thank the Lord its on the outside or we'd be deafened by the pall.

The bunk-beds come in tiers of three and arch to follow wall  
But better than a hammocks rest as it swings from fall to fall  
Our Principal sleeps in another room with beds enough to spare  
For engineering visitors the machinery for to care  
I share a room with Assistant number one  
He sleeps in the top bunk with the empty in between  
The watches that we keep at night means seldom is he seen

So I do not hear his snores while our watch keeps us apart  
But summer days grow longer while our watches get so short  
With less than eight of darkness his grunts keep me awake  
So in the comfort of the galley, I prepare our bread to bake  
skills in the art of cooking from naval service have been honed  
and I would rather cook our food than the reflectors go and clean  
Both Captain and our Number one prefer my fare to theirs

The Nation is still at war with France so protection we must take  
Just in case some mischief on this lighthouse they undertake  
They would hardly try and sink her with a broadside from their guns  
The noise would alert the neighbours and then they'd have to run  
Tis more likely that they'd board us and take away our light  
Leaving unsuspecting mariners once more to face their plight  
they would send boarding party in the darkness of the night

My cutlers skills were not in vain as cutlass blades prove true  
With a brace of loaded pistols and all are in plain view  
Ready to repel boarders that break the iron door  
After climbing thirty feet of ladder just to reach the platform floor  
We will fight them on the stairwell till their bodies block the path  
While one reloads the pistols the other will make the mass  
No Frenchmen ever came to put us to the test

We take a few days respite but taken when we can  
More often in the summer when the mail boat it can land  
But I have grown to love the place and there is nothing at all ashore  
So I give my leave to Captain Reid so his wife he can see more  
Leaving number one in charge in that I do not mind  
For he's another gentleman and one that's hard to find  
Even if his snores are loud I am the forgiving kind

As years go by and the service grows by lighthouse and by crews  
It has been decided that our manning should change too  
We should all have fair relief, both married and those single  
So we can live a normal life like our shore bound compatriots do  
In that event I must take my leave though I've no wish to mingle  
I'm a stranger in my hometown and have nowhere I can go  
My home is on the Bell Rock my only family is there too

I have saved a pretty penny and I'm told I must retire  
While I retain my health there is simply no desire  
But a letter comes that bids me well and thanks me for my time  
For devotion in their service I am thwarted in my prime  
My bags are packed and ready for the mail boat to arrive  
I'm a broken hearted Keeper without the will to stay alive  
I stride into oblivion ... ..

Eilean Mor  
The Flannan Isles

Three leagues west of the Lewis Isle  
A cluster of Skerries lay in defiance of a westerly sea  
Who's raging torrents and stormy swells  
Make battering rams against their bastion walls  
Thundering as they crash around and over  
Cascades topping even mighty Mor  
Where I stand in deference to watch in awe

My beam of light picks out  
A myriad of diamonds in surf born spray  
And spume thrown up from boiling sea  
White horses play in a distant field  
While swells and troughs roll incessantly  
Till they crash against my neighbours pile  
Lost to vision as spray fills the air with Neptune's bile

I watch these scenes as the years pass by  
A lone audience to an age old play  
And no one, not even sons of earth to keep me company  
Yet I was built as an aid to men  
And tended by them to keep me so  
Twice yearly they come and visit me  
Barely remembering their coming or seeing them go

Liken to a memory and Echo of the past  
While I was but in my infancy  
My paintwork was hardly dry and my purpose full of discovery  
My keepers too were new to post  
Though fashioned by work at other lights  
I watch them labour to keep me clean  
I see their craft put to the test

The seasons changed from autumn to winter  
When Atlantic storms conspired to gather  
One after t'other in rages batter  
Testing more than mortals in wind and weather  
My structure soundly built thus stands  
Though battle scarred and weary  
My whiteness blasted clean to stone

So it was on an eve like this, just five score years ago  
That an angry Neptune came knocking at the door  
Seeking vengeance on the souls' of men  
Just to even some lost and forgotten score  
Sending forth his heralds upon the wind  
With deepening swells in hostility  
So cruel and callous, bereft of all nobility

The sounds of banging but barely heard  
Above the noise of wind and surf  
Alerting crew to arrest the damage  
A battering door in jam a slamming  
And metal to metal of storm lockers hammering  
Though mindless of the perils awaiting  
Two went to see what they could do

Braving wind and forced to cowl  
Shielding faces with gritting scowl  
They fought their way to topmost landing  
Where locker stood bereft of door  
Silenced now with contents scattered  
Ropes once coiled, writhed now like snakes  
Towards the place where they were standing

They set about the tasks before them  
Salvaging as best they could  
Securing all in such a fashion  
That might protect from further harm  
Just as their labours all but done there came a mighty roar  
A sound that left them both bewildered  
A sound they had never heard before

Suddenly a wall of water had crashed upon the windward side  
Sweeping up and over washing clean away  
Everything not fixed or tied  
My vision all but obscured as the air was filled with blinding spray  
What happened to the other man? I simply do not know  
I heard him laying a table preparing for their tea  
He was safely in the kitchen and I did not see him go

Perhaps it was the sound that drew him out  
Seeing the wall of water it left him in no doubt  
To his fellows working a word of warning he must shout  
But the wall of water hit him  
And he was first to meet his doom  
So I was left alone in darkness  
With no light to beat the gloom

For a human lifetime they had cared for all my needs  
Seeing all the things that I saw and on what the spirit feeds  
We watched Aurora Borealis  
As the lights played through the heavens  
With its ghostly hues and rippling waves  
To match the calm and peace serene  
Of the earth bound ocean scene beneath

We have shared the better days, when Sol has worked her spell  
On balmy days her warming glow  
Dried their labours as they dressed me all in white  
But I am a bride without a groom, and none to share my plight  
So I remain a lonely spinster  
With my dreams of days to come when man will once more share with  
me  
What natures entertainment can provide