

# Rathlin Lighthouse Lives: The Spirit and Soul of Rathlin East

*The Lighthouse, Rathlin Island.*

Rathlin Island Oral History Group



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Rathlin Island Oral History Group



## To all those who lived and worked at the East Light, Rathlin Island.

Published by Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council Museum Services,  
Ballymoney  
ISBN: 978-1-9161494-8-9  
March 2023

Designed and printed by Impact Printing, Ballycastle.

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Front Cover images:  
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Postcard published by Humphrey's Quay Post Office, Ballycastle.

Back Cover Inside Flap Photograph:  
Lighthouses of Ireland, © Commissioners of Irish Lights.



*East Lighthouse, courtesy of the Farren family*



*Lower tower with John Cleary on top of the dome, courtesy of Paddy Cleary*



*Cottage at Rathlin East Light, formerly lighthouse family accommodation, now used by visiting staff and contractors of the Commissioners of Irish Lights, by Tom McDonnell*

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## Foreword



The Commissioners of Irish Lights is delighted that the memories and stories of work and life at Altacarry, Rathlin East Light have been collected by the island's oral history group, on behalf of the Rathlin Development and Community Association (RDCA), and that this book has been produced to highlight some of the material in this unique collection. This new book commemorates the island's rich lighthouse heritage and the impact the East Light and all who have lived and worked there have had on the island.

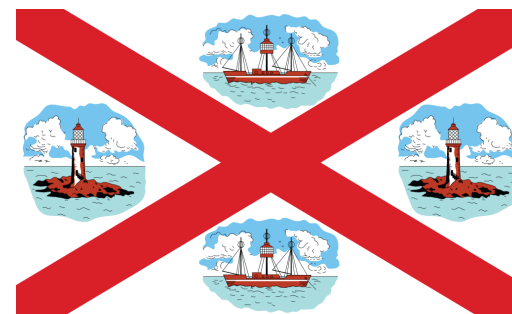
Irish Lights has been a guardian of maritime heritage for over 200 years and has sought over time to positively impact on coastal communities through the provision of our navigation services and using our coastal infrastructure for tourism and heritage activity. We will continue to preserve key elements of our heritage reflecting our history and traditions while also working with communities on Rathlin Island to present our unique heritage to the wider world. One way that Irish Lights does this is through our Great Lighthouses of Ireland tourism partnership, which comprises 17 lighthouse sites that are open to the public to visit or stay at. One of these sites is Rathlin West Lighthouse and RSPB Sanctuary which has been a great success and a superb example of partnership with government departments, community groups and locals to create a wonderful visitor experience. I've no doubt this partnership will again bring together the vision for the East Light which will complement all the other wonderful experiences on Rathlin Island.

As the plans the community have for the East Light develop, there will be further opportunities to showcase and incorporate the history of the location and to embed the memories, stories, and photographs that have been collected as part of the 'Rathlin Lighthouse Lives' project. The very name of the project captures the twin aspects of looking back and preserving the living history and impact that the lighthouse community had and also looking to the future and how the lighthouse can live on and play a central role in the life of the island.

The vision of the Rathlin Development and Community Association is an inspiring one, and I have no doubt that it will be a great success in bringing about positive change for Rathlin Island and its communities.

The Northern Ireland Executive, comprising Department for Infrastructure, together with the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs and at the Department of Finance are committed to working with the RDCA to make this vision a reality, and Irish Lights look forward to seeing this vision for Rathlin Island and the East Light unfold.

**Yvonne Shields O'Connor**  
Chief Executive  
Commissioners of Irish Lights





Map of Rathlin showing location of the island's lighthouses, courtesy of Nic Wright

"We are very unique, we have three lighthouses on Rathlin ... Rathlin East was so unique because the keepers at the West, all the families stayed at the East ... the families ... integrated into the community."

**Marina McMullan**

"That was one of the advantages of Rathlin. It was an island, it was still classed as a rock station, and you got rock pay for that. But like compared to other rock stations where there wasn't any population, they only had three keepers on at a time and some days you wouldn't have really much room to walk about on."

**Paddy Cleary**

## About the East Light Oral History Project

The East Light Oral History Project was carried out, at the invitation of the Rathlin Development and Community Association, by the Rathlin Island Oral History Group over the first six months of 2021. Initial meetings were held, under the guidance of Arthur McIvor, Co-Director of the Scottish Oral History Centre, University of Strathclyde; Margot McCuaig, film director and writer; and Nic Wright, Museum Services Community Engagement Officer, Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council, to discuss and plan the scope of the project and prompts that could be included in the oral history interviews.

Interviewees – those who had worked, lived or been associated with the lighthouse community – were identified and invited to participate in an interview with a member of the oral history group. In total 28 interviews were undertaken with 29 individuals (the first was a paired interview involving two members of the oral history group). Interviews ranged in duration from short conversations of just over ten minutes to over an hour. As this project was undertaken during the Covid-19 pandemic, all the interviews were undertaken online and digitally recorded and then transcribed. Photographs were also taken of each interviewee, as well as the members of the Rathlin Oral History Group, and participants were invited to also provide any personal photographs they had relating to the East Light.

In addition to the oral history interviews, a professional film was commissioned and made by film-maker Margot McCuaig about Rathlin islander, Noel McCurdy and his time at the East Light and what working there has meant to him.

The final part of the project involved an online event where the film was shown, along with some of the stories and images collected from the interviewees, to the island community. Participants at this event were also encouraged to share any memories or stories they had relating to the East Light. Visual minutes were commissioned for this event and these capture and reflect the event and overall project in a visually effective manner (see inside back cover).

Overall, the project generated more than 150,000 words of transcripts and material, and this book is an opportunity to share a small number of these. We hope that it will provide an insight into the life and work of generations at the East Light, and the long-lasting impact on the island community. In the future it is anticipated that more material from the project will be available online.

# History of Rathlin East Light

**55° 18.111' North 06° 10.313' West**

A request from mariners for a light on Rathlin Island was first made in 1827, but due to differences of opinion between the Commissioners of Northern Lights in Edinburgh and the Corporation for Improving the Port of Dublin or Ballast Board, the final approval from Trinity House was not obtained until March 1847 and construction did not start until May 1849. The buildings were designed by the Ballast Board's Inspector of Works & Inspector of Lighthouses, George Halpin, and were constructed by the Board's workmen.

Two lights, an upper occulting light and lower fixed light, so as not to be confused with other lights when approaching and passing through the North Channel, were established on 1 November 1856. The tower of the upper light is built of stone from the island and is 26.8m (88 feet) overall height. The light is 74m (243 feet) above high water, and originally had an occulting character of 50 seconds bright with 10 seconds dark. The light also showed a red sector over Carrick-a-vaan Rock, off Kenbane Head on the mainland. The lower light consisted of a lantern placed close to the base of the tower, the light was 55.5m (182 feet) above high water and showed a fixed or non-flashing light.

On 18 January 1866 a fog signal was established which consisted of an 18 pounder gun and was fired every 20 minutes during fog conditions. Over the years the frequency of the detonation was increased to 15 minutes, then 8 minutes.

The lower fixed light was discontinued on 1 July 1894 and at the same time the tower light was intensified. In 1912 a further change was made to the main light when a completely new optic was installed with a vaporised paraffin burner giving four flashes every 20 seconds. In 1918 the fog gun was replaced by an explosive fog signal consisting of a double tonite explosion every 5 minutes.

The colour of the tower seems to have been originally natural stone with a broad red belt under the lantern balcony, then the stone was painted white (still with the red belt). This lasted until 1934 when the red belt was changed to black as it is today.

The red sector over the Carrick-a-vaan rock was discontinued in 1938.

From September 1965 the explosive fog signal was accompanied by a brilliant flash of light when sounding during hours of darkness. The explosive fog signal was finally discontinued in 1972 for security reasons along with other similar fog signals around the coast. A Radiobeacon was established five months later sending out its signal AH in Morse every six minutes. It was coupled with five other stations in the group.

Rathlin East Lighthouse was converted to electric operation in 1981 and has a 920mm catadioptric annular lens and MBI 1kW lamps in a UVLA40 lampchanger.

On the 31 March 1995 the lighthouse was converted to automatic operation and the Keepers were withdrawn from the station. The station is now in the care of an Attendant and the aids to navigation are also monitored via a telemetry link from the Lighthouse Depot in Dun Laoghaire. Since November 1995 the light is exhibited by day to improve the daytime conspicuity of the station. The Medium Frequency Radiobeacon service was discontinued on 1 February 1999. In October 2003 an experimental Automatic Identification System (AIS) was established at Rathlin East Lighthouse.

During 2021 and 2022, Irish Lights undertook engineering works to upgrade all three Lighthouses on Rathlin Island, while retaining the historic lenses. In preparation for these engineering works, Irish Lights completed a successful three-year trial of an innovative bearing system which will allow retention of the First Order rotating Fresnel Lenses at Rathlin East and West Lighthouses.

The large First Order Fresnel lens at Rathlin East is an exceptional work of engineering. As originally designed the lens, which weighs several tonnes, rotates on a bath containing more than 30 litres of mercury. Today, mercury is recognised as a highly toxic substance and Irish Lights and other Lighthouse Authorities are in the process of removing all mercury from lighthouses to improve safety standards. While alternative, low maintenance options exist, Irish Lights is committed, where possible, to keeping these Fresnel lenses in use to preserve the heritage at its lighthouse sites.

The engineering works at Rathlin East has resulted in:

- Retaining the current rotating beam and use of the existing rotating historic lens
- Replacement of high energy lamps (1,000 watts) with LED (70 watts)
- Removal of mercury and diesel generators from each lighthouse, for safety reasons and to improve environmental impact
- Reduction in the range of the light to 18 miles, as per 2010 and 2015 Aids to Navigation Reviews for the UK and Ireland.

Going forward, Rathlin East will no longer be a 24 hour light – it will operate at night-time only.

(Reproduced from the Irish Lights webpage and Rathlin Island Work Programme 2021, with the permission of the Commissioners of Irish Lights: <https://www.irishlights.ie/tourism/our-lighthouses/rathlin-east.aspx> and <https://www.irishlights.ie/media/55434/Rathlin-Factsheet.pdf>)



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## Notices to Mariners

### Rathlin East Lighthouse - Light reduction in range

04 - 2021

Issue Date: Monday 8 March 2021

**Aid:** Rathlin East Lighthouse

**Area:**

The Commissioners of Irish Lights hereby give notice that on 15th March 2021, or as soon thereafter as circumstances permit, a new light with decreased range will be installed at Rathlin East Lighthouse. This light will be exhibited during hours of darkness only.

Position:	55° 18.093'N 006° 10.267'W (WGS 84 Datum)	
Sector:	W Vis 110° - 006° (256°) W Vis 036°-058° (22°)	
Character:	Fl. (4) W 20s	
Phasing:	0.2+2.3+0.2+2.3+0.2+2.3+0.2+12.3 = 20s	
Day Mark:	White Tower, Black Band	
Elevation:	27 metres	
	<b>EXISTING LIGHT</b>	<b>NEW LIGHT</b>
Range:	26 Nautical Miles	18 Nautical Miles
Hours of Operation:	24 Hours	Hours of Darkness Only

Radio Navigation Warnings will be issued when the above changes take place.

By Order, Yvonne Shields O'Connor Chief Executive

*Notice to Mariners from the Commissioners of Irish Lights regarding the light reduction in range at Rathlin East Lighthouse, courtesy CIL website*



## Work and life at Rathlin East Light

"From my first day on Rathlin, I thought there was something special about the place."

**Paddy Cleary**

"All lighthouses have a unique signal, Rathlin East has a unique signal too. The unique signal is based on the amount of flashes per second that the lighthouse has, so that when the light and lens was set up it was set up for a specific reason to give a flash, that would be different to anywhere else. So Rathlin East when it was set up, it was four flashes every twenty seconds and that is still the case"

**Noel McCurdy**

"I'm a lighthouse keepers' son and a lighthouse keepers' grandson and a lighthouse keepers' great grandson. So, I am fourth generation lighthouse keeper. I joined the lighthouse service as a supernumerary assistant keeper in 1968 ... in 1969, I got sent to Rathlin East ... there was the most spectacular view out across the bay, the Scottish Islands to the Mull of Kintyre to Sanda and to Ailsa Craig and I thought, wasn't this amazing ... it's the most spectacularly scenic lighthouse I was ever at. Beautiful place Altacarry Head, nothing like it."

**Alex Hamilton**

"I spent some time up in Rathlin in 1981. And I lost my job to automation ... I was in the second last group of lightkeepers who were ever trained. ... I must admit I'd never heard of Rathlin when I joined Irish Lights and when I was told I was being transferred there I had to look at this big giant map we have in the Bailey Lighthouse to see where all the lighthouses are to see where I was going."

**Richard Cummins**

"... people were expected to go and do temporary cover in any station around the whole of the 32 counties of Ireland, because it was an all-Ireland service."

**Alex Hamilton**

"I loved the old job, I really did."

**Sean O'Donnell**

"I was doing temporary lightkeeper up at the East ... I was doing the equivalent of nearly four days for 3 pound 25."

**Loughie McCuaig**

"When I joined the service, it was six weeks on and two weeks off, but that only lasted for a short while because as I say, terms and conditions improved after I joined and then it went down to a month on and two weeks off and that was great ... And then a few years later they introduced a month on and a month off."

**Noel McCurdy**

"The watches were - you had four hours duty and eight hours off. They were 6-10, 10-2, and 2-6. So, whenever you were on 6-10 in the morning, you do 6-10 in the afternoon. Same with the 10-2 and the 2-6 you would be on through the night."

**Paddy Cleary**

"You would always rotate the watches. So, the 6-10 was probably the busiest watch, because that was the one that mostly involved you lighting the light and putting out the light. And cleaning up and after you had the light lit, then you spent you time during the night or early morning on watch ... there was always a rota of work you had to do. So, the 6-10 man's job in the morning was to sort out the coal fire, make sure there was water in the kettles and that. Wash the floors, do all the tidying up."

**Noel McCurdy**

"Well, the watch was always kept up in the tower, it was called the Watch room, it was just directly below the lantern. There would have been a chair and a desk there and your report books and your logbook would've been kept there. So, every hour you would have put in that logbook about the weather conditions or anything else that was unusual. If a ship was stopped or something you would have logged that ship being stopped, that was done up in the tower and you weren't allowed to leave the tower during your four hours, unless you were going to call either another keeper for his next watch, or you were going to start the fog signal."

**Noel McCurdy**

"You had to walk up the stairs and wind the light with the handle and on the end of a rope there was about 200 weight of lead. It was geared so well; that it was quite easy to wind. When you got it up to the top, that lasted for 50 minutes. And you had to make sure, that you wound it before the 50 was up otherwise the light would be stopped."

**Loughie McCuaig**

"A big heavy weight went right down to the bottom, you see, and there was a centre in the tower itself. And the weight went up and down it and you had to wind it right up to the top, and then it fell down in like a hour's time and that timed the frequency of the light, to shine."

**Bill Farren**

"It was a paraffin light. Similar to how a Tilly lamp operates, you heat the retort and the burner and when the retort is hot you turn on the oil and that creates a vapour, and you flick the blow lamp across the mantle. The mantle is the thing that gives the light and that burst into light and that's your light then for the duration of the night ... The light always went on about twenty minutes before, half an hour I'll say, to fifty minutes before sunset it had to be lit by that stage."

**Noel McCurdy**

"It was vaporised paraffin ... it was floating on a bed of mercury ... there is very little friction in mercury."

**Sean Roddy**



*Electrification of the East Light from an incandescent burner, 1981, courtesy of Paddy Cleary*

"...the light is lit, we had the lens running, the lens was the thing that turns round and gives the flashes, that works on a weighted system, a lead weight that runs down the centre of the tower. But the East, that weight had to be brought back, wound up every forty-five minutes. So, every forty-five minutes you had to go into the wee lantern, spin the handle around and get this weight back up otherwise if you didn't go and do that, the light would stop and if you stopped the light like that, you were in trouble."

**Noel McCurdy**

"Years ago, when I was in, if the light was stopped for an hour, it was a hanging offence."

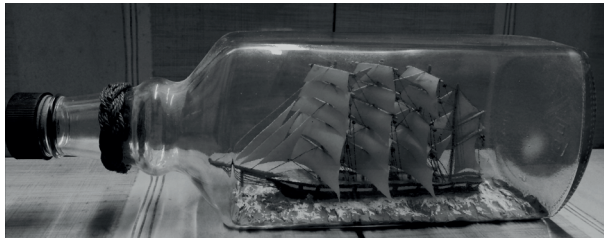
**Sean Roddy**

"In 1969, I got sent to Rathlin East ... the Principal Keeper was Ellis Butler and Charlie Hernan ... the astronauts had landed on the moon ... there was going to be a live transmission starting at about 4am. And I thought, that means starting the generator. And I thought, well, this is a moment in history that I can't miss, so I went out and started the generator and turned on the TV and watched grainy old images of Neil Armstrong going down the ladder... I lost track of time and forgot about the, the winding of the light. And I knew that I had only minutes to spare before that switch closed and the PK's alarm bell would go off, so I had to run like the devil to get up to the top of the tower. And I thought, one small step for Neil Armstrong - but many steps for me to get up to the top of the tower before I got into serious trouble."

**Alex Hamilton**

"I started making ships in bottles again. I used to do that at Rathlin East, I found it nice it was a way of keeping me awake. You go up, you check on the light and you'd start working on your ship and then you'd go and check around you again. So, it'd keep you awake."

**Richard Cummins**



*Ship in bottle made on Rathlin, courtesy of John and Jennifer McCurdy*



*Alex Hamilton in uniform, courtesy of Alex Hamilton*

"They had a fog signal there. But it wasn't an engine, it was explosives and it ... and you had to sit in the wee hut and set off the timings of the explosives all the time ... you had a timing machine in the fog house and you connected up the explosives and every time the bell went out you had to press the button and the fog signal went off."

**Bill Farren**

"If the fog came within three miles of the lighthouse, you had to sound the fog signal which was an explosive charge, two every five minutes."

**Sean Roddy**

"I'm taking you over to the rocket house. This is where they fired the rockets during fog. We had two big jibs on the top of that building and you fed the tonites on to the hoist and every three minutes you fired the tonites. The tonite would be a massive explosive plus a flash and that was the rocket house. The building next to it was one of the magazine stores because you couldn't store the tonite and the detonators that were needed to create the explosion. So, they were kept separately."

**Noel McCurdy**

"It used to be an explosive fog signal there up until 1972, but they were all taken away for security reasons, one day, the whole coast was cleared of all the explosives. And they had been replaced by other types of fog signal, but the East was just left without a fog signal then, so that was one less job you had for watching for fog."

**Paddy Cleary**



*Bill (Willie) Farren and Cathal Meehan, both served at Rathlin East Light, courtesy of the Farren family*



*Thomas and William Glanville at Rathlin East Lighthouse, courtesy of Ellen Glanville*



*Rocket House, courtesy of Margaret McQuilkin*



**COMMISSIONERS OF IRISH LIGHTS**

*Thomas Glanville, Lighthouse Keeper 511*

**SERVICE RECORD**

Date of Birth	29th January 1934
Entry into Service	2nd September 1955
Appointed as Supernumerary Keeper	2nd September 1955
Promoted to Assistant Keeper	22nd September 1959
Promoted to Principal Keeper	23rd January 1980
Retired from Service on Voluntary Redundancy Grounds	6th October 1989
Died	4 <sup>th</sup> July 2014

**SERVED AT THE FOLLOWING STATIONS**

<i>Station</i>	<i>Period</i>	<i>From</i>	<i>To</i>	<i>Rank</i>
Rathlin West	1 year 1 month	22.9.1959	11.10.1960	AK
Eeragh	2 years 2 months	28.10.1960	13.12.1962	AK
St Johns Point	2 years 2 months	28.12.1962	25.2.1965	AK
Maidens	3 years 8 months	25.2.1965	1.11.1968	AK
Blackhead Antrim	6 years 7 months	1.11.1968	31.5.1975	AK
Ferris Point	4 years 7 months	15.6.1975	22.1.1980	AK
Declined promotion to PK – December 1979 (in order to avoid being transferred from Northern Ireland to Kish and subsequent loss of welfare benefits, etc). Placed below O. F. Crowley, PK 513 (as a result of declining promotion)				
Mew Island	3 years 11 months	8.2.1980	6.1.1984	PK
Rathlin East	3 years 1 month	16.1.1984	24.2.1987	PK
Tory Island	0 years 5 months	2.4.1987	20.8.1987	PK
Mew Island	2 years 1 month	25.9.1987	6.10.1989	PK

*Example of a Service Record for Thomas Glanville, courtesy of Ellen Glanville*

IRISH LIGHTS OFFICE,  
28, D'OLIER STREET, (Box 73)  
DUBLIN, O.S.  
13th March, 1939.

Any further communication should be addressed to "THE SECRETARY," and the following number should be quoted.

Telegraphic Address: "Irish Lights, Dublin" Telephone 4228.

A.B. Armstrong  
PRINCIPAL KEEPER  
Rathlin Island

With reference to letter dated 6th instant received from J.K. Glanville A.K. which owing to your absence from duty on sick leave was not countersigned by you. Please instruct this Keeper to inform the Registrar General that as he is permanently in the employment of the Commissioners of Irish Lights, as a Lightkeeper, application for his release in the event of War should be made by the Registrar General to the Secretary, Irish Lights Office, Dublin.

Glanville is at present performing National Service, and it is unlikely that he would be transferred to employment other than the Crown Forces.

The Circular which accompanied Glanville's letter is returned herewith to be handed to him.

*W. D. David*  
Inspector and Marine Supt.

Letter to J.K Glanville whilst stationed at the East Lighthouse, courtesy of Ellen Glanville

COMMISSIONERS OF IRISH LIGHTS  
16 LOWER PEMBROKE STREET (BOX 73) DUBLIN 2  
TELEGRAPHIC ADDRESS: "Lighthouses, Dub" TELEPHONE 65941

Any further communication should be addressed to the Secretary and the following number should be quoted. IMS/100/60 VI

Your Reference: 4th July, 1969.

Mr. Noel S. McCurdy,  
Sea View,  
Rathlin Island,  
Ballycastle,  
Co. Antrim.

Dear Sir,

With reference to previous correspondence regarding your candidature for appointment as a Lightkeeper, please note that an unexpected situation has arisen which will enable us to call you up for appointment on the 1st August.

As already notified to you, your appointment will be conditional on your passing a medical examination by the Principal Medical Officer.

Please state whether you will be available for medical examination and call-up on or about the 1st August.

Yours faithfully,  
*[Signature]*  
SECRETARY

Letter to Noel McCurdy from the Commissioners of Irish Lights, courtesy of Patricia McCurdy

"The Principal Keeper [PK] was the boss and then you'd two Assistant Keepers [AK]. Both those keepers, Assistants, would have been the same rank, but you might've had a Senior Assistant Keeper. Though that title didn't exist, but when I joined, you were a junior keeper, you respected not only the PK but also the Senior Assistant too, 'cause he was maybe twenty, thirty years in the service."

Noel McCurdy

"There was no mobile phones, no walkie talkies, nothing ... That was one of the things we had to learn when we joined the service, was the morse code and semaphore."

Noel McCurdy

"The Rue light was looked after by the East lighthouse keepers."

Rosalene Cecil

"The lighthouse was built on the 'Cecil' land"

Mary Cecil

"In those days, of any lighthouse you went to, you could nearly eat your dinner off the floor, it was that well-kept."

Paddy Cleary



Paddy Cleary, circa 1977, courtesy of Paddy Cleary



*Photograph taken from the lighthouse tower, courtesy of Jim Curry*



*Bill (Willie) Farren and Bobby Nelson at the East Light, courtesy of the Farren family*



*Sean Roddy at the East Light, courtesy of the Farren family*

"They [the Irish Lights Commissioners] would turn up ... you know the station walls would be whitewashed, grass would be cut, the uniforms would be taken out and the peak caps would come out for the once-a-year airing. And everybody's house would be spick and span, and everybody was being nice as ninepins to the Commissioner's and so on. I remember it vividly. It was a very big day in the life of lighthouse keepers."

**Hugh O'Donnell**

"They came once a year ... you put out the Commissioners' flag for them. They had their own House Flag as they called it ... I think it was green and blue and white. Just said Irish Lights on it, the Commissioners of Irish Lights."

**Gerald McCurdy**

"They were like visiting dignitaries, you know royalty."

**Hugh O'Donnell**

"When the Commissioners came, the cars and motorbikes [that would normally have been at the East Light] usually landed down at our house so it was like a car park around the house, there might have been a few old bangers of cars sitting there and the odd motorbike."

**Patricia McCurdy**



*Granuaile – lighthouse steamer, circa 1971, courtesy of Noel McCurdy*

"[Down from the lighthouse] my neighbours, Frank and Dora [McCurdy] were lovely people, lovely people ... I remember Mary McQuilkin and Joseph lived down below Frank ... and then there was Dougal Cecil and then as you went down Mickey McCuaig, Loughie's father ... they were all lovely people."

**Bill Farren**

"My father was a lighthouse keeper there, he was born on Rathlin, and I served there, I was on Rathlin East."

**Alan Glanville**

"Two great years, myself and Paddy Enright, and George Kavanagh ... Gerry [McCurdy] was there for a while as well."

**Sean O'Donnell**

"Vincent Cecil used to do temporary there and Tommy Cecil done temporary work there for them at the East ... Way far back Mickey McCuaig used to be the temporary for the East, he used to work there. I think Loughie [McCuaig] worked at it for a while too."

**Gerald McCurdy**

"There was always a lighthouse keeper there, but he [Vincent Cecil] would be called on to come ... like he learnt a lot, I mean it was good experience for him."

**Rosaleen Cecil**

"Irish Lights were very good at employing local labour, for helping out when they needed extra help."

**Marina McMullan**



*Islander Tommy Cecil, courtesy of Mary Cecil*



*Rosaleen and Vincent Cecil, 1971, courtesy of Rosaleen Cecil*

"The worst thing was whitewashing the wall, the outside, you had no ropes or anything on you, you just walked along and whitewashed it ... I used to have to paint the dome you know, with just off a ladder ... is it 60 meters?"

**Gerald McCurdy**

"It wasn't just the lighthouse keepers that were there, there were various workmen over the years as well."

**Margaret McQuilkin**

"I remember Joe Sheridan and Frank Doyle and they spent a lot of time on the island. I also remember, there was a man Jim Hickey, he was away in the early 70s. There was quite a lot of tradesmen, Eamon Purdy, Peter Deaton, Billy Kelly."

**Patricia McCurdy**

"There were a few other lads who used to come out, Tom O'Dowd the ET [electrical technician], he used to come out too time and again."

**Sean O'Donnell**

"The first time I went to Rathlin was about 1979. It was the time when they were building ... the new engine room up at the East. It was Joe Sheridan and Tony Reynolds was there and we were sent out to give them a hand to put on the roof on it. They put on a concrete roof on it and we were sent out to give them a hand ... Johnny's [Curry] brother was here, Raymond [Curry] and Martin [McCurdy] they were up working there as well. That was me first time on Rathlin ... Myself and Paul [McCarron] did all the work on the cottage and that was a brilliant job."

**Hugh McBride**

"There is one cottage still there, you know for workmen would be using the cottage there. ... If somebody [from the lighthouse] was able to fix something, and they did many a time. Especially in the winter-time, if your generator stopped and you weren't able to do it, on Rathlin ... they were very obliging that way"

**Marina McMullan**

## Supplies and transport

"My association with the lighthouses started when I was about, I would say about 13 or 14. Obviously it was unofficial. But I was travelling with my father [Mickey McCuaig] to all three lighthouses. 'Cause he was contracted to bring all the provisions to these lighthouses ... it was by horse and cart and horse and cart is very slow."

**Loughie McCuaig**

"The early thirties, the man who had the contract then was a John McKinley, and he would've been some relation to Joseph's grandfather, Joseph McQuilkin. This is him, his horse and cart down at the pier. In those days the light keepers had baskets covered with canvas to keep the sea water out of them of getting wet. And this shows Jimmy McCurdy putting those baskets into the boat."

**Jim Curry**



*Horse and cart on Station pier alongside boat, courtesy of Jim Curry*

"My father had the contract, his cart and whatever to take the goods, and the keepers, from the harbour to the lighthouse. He got his contract in 1948 and I was at that time, nine years old. And he did it with a horse and cart for about a year and then he got the tractor ... Before that, Micky McCuaig, Loughie's father had it for quite a number of years ... Johnny [Jim's brother] took over from him for years after."

**Jim Curry**

"So, it [Rathlin] made a big impression, but you know obviously they were very good sea men ... landing on the island, we had Bill Curry with his tractor and trailer. We loaded up and off we went in the back of his trailer, up to Rathlin East, that was my introduction to island life."

**Hugh O'Donnell**



*Bill Curry standing at his trailer, George Coulter, Robin Polly (on right), 1950s, courtesy of Jim Curry*



*Bill Curry in his Land Rover, circa 1960, courtesy of Jim Curry*



“They [Irish Lights] gave you the passbook, and you wrote out on the book what you wanted and the boatman took it ashore and wee Paddy [McQuilkin] went up to the grocery shop and he collected the food, or the provisions.”

**Sean Roddy**

“My great grandfather Willy Williamson had it [the contract for the relief boats/lighthouse boat], and then my grandfather Jimmy Hegarty had it, and after John James McCurdy his father had it, and then of course Jimmy [McCurdy] and Paddy [McQuilkin] and Dougal [Cecil] then ... I know there was various people in it at various times, but it would only be from Jimmy, Paddy and Dougal's time and Joe McCurdy was on their boat too for a while as well. Seamus [McCurdy], Sean McCurdy, cousins, they were along with them as well for a while.”

**Jim Curry**



*Rathlin boatmen Paddy McQuilkin and Jimmy McCurdy with supplies, 1974, © Chronicle and Constitution Archive, courtesy Coleraine Museum*



*Relief boat, circa 1971, courtesy of Noel McCurdy*

"The Gages pier was never used, by the local boats, it was always the station pier."

**Sean Roddy**

"Smaller boats, half deckers and that, you know. They all had to be launched and hauled each time."

**Gerald McCurdy**

"The actual relief days it was your provisions goods and stuff like that, but then there was other stuff like coal and oil which came in maybe once a year, that had to be transported from the harbour to each lighthouse ... that [the lighthouse steamer] would've delivered most of the oil for both the West and East and then they delivered it all at the one time and it was stored at the pier ... They had their boats, they weren't very big boats, they weren't 30ft boats, but they were designed to carry maybe five/ten barrels at a time. But ... they could load it a lot quicker than we could take it away ... it was stored on the old Pier [the Station pier]."

**Jim Curry**

"In the late 50s, the Irish Lights decided to build a jetty at the Port, for their ship whenever it was coming in. If they couldn't land in Church Bay, in them days there was no breakwaters or anything, always a bit dodgy getting a landing up in Church Bay. So, they always wanted a second landing, so if they couldn't land on Church Bay they would come round and land at Portawilllin."

**Noel McCurdy**

"Ballycastle didn't have a great pier, just a single pier. If you left any goods along it ... the tide had have come in, it just washed all the stuff ... I seen them come in different times and us sitting waiting for them and they [the relief boat] couldn't ... the boat would've been caught and thrown up onto the rocks ... they were shouting at us, we could understand ... 'we will try tomorrow' ... maybe the next day wasn't as good either ... most of them maybe came to Ballycastle and stayed in Marcus Jamison's for their overnight."

**Francis McGinn**

"Brian Boyles was always the place, he had a whole rake of stuff, ready for the boat, you know ... you had rang through your order, you knew what you were getting and then all parcelled up ... there wasn't so much plastic bags in them days, it was all boxes and then them parcelled up ... Brian was very, very good."

**Francis McGinn**

"He [Senior Assistant Keeper] would be fairly well up on the book work, like he had oil returns, how much oil/paraffin was used. How much diesel was used in the engines, you know, he had to log all that and keep an account of how much you have, how much you've used and how much you've left. And then whenever you would be running low, you'd send an order to the office and they'd send the ship up with the oil, *Granuaile*."

**Paddy Cleary**

"... because of the way the Troubles was and all that, they didn't want the lighthouse keepers to go from maybe say Ballycastle to Belfast because they had to wear the uniform ... and of course they could've got mistaken, they could have been shot wearing a uniform ... rather than the guys getting off in Belfast and travelling by train down to Dublin or wherever they were going to. Then they were allowed to get a taxi over the border to go to Dundalk ... it was Sean Roddy then, at that time him and my father and they were looking for a taxi firm to start and just take the guys back and forward. So that's how Sean Roddy spoke to me, my dad would never say no to nothing."

**Francis McGinn**

"The keepers when they were going on and going off they always met at Tessie Bakewell's for their beer because they haven't seen each other for maybe a month or maybe two month."

**Francis McGinn**

"All the lighting in the house was done with either oil lamps, one of which I have still got by the way, or Tilly lamps which came in ... And there was no running water. So, the water came from rainwater off the roof ... of course, there was no TV, we had radio there, wireless that's what we used to call them, and they used to be running on batteries ... And every week wee Paddy McQuilkin would come up to the lighthouse, and collect the batteries, to be taken down, brought ashore on a Tuesday, to be recharged in Ballycastle, which of course had electricity."

**Hugh O'Donnell**

"There were various contracts associated with the up keeping of a lighthouse. Tommy's grandfather John Cecil, would have transported materials and supplies and at one point when Tommy was a teenager, his father Dougal and his older brother Vincent did a bit of labouring work for the lighthouse."

**Mary Cecil**

"There was no electricity at the station, and there was a tiny little generator, which was put there to power television when television came along."

**Alex Hamilton**

"Aiden Polly and Jackie Kelly, they did a very good garden at the lower end of the lighthouse grounds on the East side, it's kind of dipped down and sheltered. They fenced it off and we had to dig down into the ground because the rabbits were getting in. ... they had wonderful stuff in it you know, fresh vegetables potatoes, cabbage, you name it."

**Paddy Cleary**

"We baked our own bread ... all our own cooking yes ... the pots and pans were supplied, everything was supplied, you know ... The bed and bedding and your clothes even, bed, blankets and sheets ... We were well catered for."

**Sean Roddy**

"But it was no bother then cooking because my ma ... she used to make you up like 28 days food, you know all the wee meals."

**Alan Glanville**



*Paddy Cleary and Jackie Kelly, courtesy of Paddy Cleary*



*Lighthouse keeper Robin Polly, courtesy of John and Jennifer McCurdy*

## The lighthouse, community and island

"But we were lucky enough on Rathlin like, it wasn't like an out landing station, for residents of Rathlin you had a shop and a post office, a pub, and two churches if you were so inclined."

**Sean Roddy**

"East was like a wee village in its own for all the lighthouse families ... [it] brought up the population of the island as well."

**Margaret McQuilkin**

"I have two brothers, who served in Irish lights, Gerald [McCurdy] the eldest of the four boys, and Noel the youngest of the four boys. They were both lighthouse keepers ... there was always a lighthouse keeper about the house, and I always remember one in particular, Paddy Barry, Paddy taught me how to play draughts."

**Patricia McCurdy**

"In October 1948, I was three years of age, and one month old, I was brought to Rathlin as a baby ... I started the school there in 1951. ... Striking features, that struck me with living in a lighthouse was that, first of all, we were living in the house that was next door to the tallest building on Rathlin, and one with the largest brightest light."

**Patrick O'Donnell**



*Paddy and Kathleen O'Donnell with their baby son Patrick, courtesy of Marina McMullan*

"We played horseshoes all summer every day ... Of course we used to do all our fishing, you know the Gunners rock ... we played football every Sunday ... it was down at night in the summer at the back of the post office ... What great fun that was."

**Neil Loughrey**

"I liked fishing ... It was fly fishing mostly you know ... I'd fish off the rocks with the spinning rod off Tavock ... I continued that fly fishing [at] Ushet and Cleggan."

**Sean Roddy**

"He [Ambrose Armstrong] used to just love going out with his father [Ambrose Bloxom Armstrong] because they had a wee boat. The two of them, my granda and my dad used to go out fishing quite a bit, and they just loved the whole island life."

**Billy Armstrong**

"When Peter and Noel and them were heading off down the road in the evening time, some of the keepers would come down and meet them and they would all head off down the road to play football."

**Patricia McCurdy**

"Peter McCurdy and Joseph McQuilkin, Loughie McCuaig, ... and Joe Drumm [played football]."

**Sean Roddy**

"We were model yacht racing at Ushet and off course me dad was a very keen yachtsman, they all made their own yachts ... I used to get a great buzz out of that because the Uncle James and Sylvie [McMullan] had a yacht as well and we ran for hours, right round that Ushet Lough turning the yachts, that had a big impression on me."

**Patrick O'Donnell**

"We even had a little theatre in the O'Donnell's shed, I suppose it was, around the back and we used to put on plays and all that sort of stuff."

**Neil Loughrey**

"I was on Rathlin Island from 1936 the year I was born at the East lighthouse until 1943. ... There were six houses - three for the keepers at the East and three for the West and the keepers interchanged every so often. ... When I was there, there was Mrs Armstrong, Ambrose Armstrong Senior was the Principal Keeper ... And then there was a Scanlan with a family."

**Billy Glanville**

"I can remember, three families ... Well, the first ones were Paddy O'Donnell's family, they were there when I started school ... The next lot of lighthouse keepers' families that I remember there were again they were O'Donnell's. The father there, David O'Donnell he was the PK at the East. There was a big family of them ... But during their time there, the Loughrey's came."

**Anne McAuley**

"I was born while they were at Rathlin, in the Dalriada Hospital."

**Sean O'Donnell**

"My father Thomas Glanville ... was born at Rathlin East lighthouse. His father was JK Glanville, his mother was Dymrna McCurdy, a Rathlin Island lady, they got married and they had their four children at Rathlin East ... I actually found out that my great grandfather, also called Thomas Glanville was stationed at Rathlin twice throughout the years ... Daddy was born on Rathlin and then got stationed back on the island with Robin Polly. They were both young men starting out on their careers together."

**Ellen Glanville**

"Douglas [Dougal] Cecil was a great man too. He gave us lobsters and crabs... Because my mother [Dymrna nee McCurdy] used to give him Gold Flake Cigarettes."

**William Glanville**

"Bridget Flannery, Tommy's mother came to the island from Porturlin, a small fishing [village] in Mayo, to help look after the children of a lighthouse keeper. She met and married Dougal and had three children; Vincent, Tommy and his sister Mary."

**Mary Cecil**

"Of course there was Flan Egan at the far end which I think is the only house left now."

**Neil Loughrey**

"Every year Brigadier Gage would throw a party for the school ... I remember going there, they would be playing games like tug of war and stuff like that in the grounds of the manor house. ... they would serve you lemonade and buns and biscuits ... and there was a lady there called Mrs Campbell."

**Hugh O'Donnell**

"My son Douglas was told by his great aunt Mary Cecil, that when they were kids they used to play games with the children of the keepers and would go out around the walls regular which doesn't even bear thinking about."

**Mary Cecil**

"I know of a story that one of the big sea mines had washed ashore just at the cliff outside the gate of the East and daddy and uncle Willy stood with their catapults, they had been told not to go near it but of course. You know what boys are like, especially Glanville boys. So the two of them and their catapults blew away the whole side of the cliff."

**Ellen Glanville**

"Down in that port was the remains of I think there's a wee shop that some of the lighthouse children would have had when they were small, that would be the nearest port for them to get access into, there was all these tins and bits and pieces there and I remember my father telling me that was the wee ones at the lighthouse used that for playing. And then I used to play with it then too."

**Margaret McQuilkin**

"My dad loved it because he had the freedom, he had the freedom of the East, he had the whole island to himself."

**Billy Armstrong**

"I can remember the way to school, walking down the road ... Rain or shine down that long road ... there's a wee lough there and you turn at a right, you turn more or less at a right angle and then round that lough and down past the gate, past your house [McCurdy family home] on the right, up Ballycarry Brae ... and then past Morrison's on the left ... and then up to Tramore Brae up to the top ... and then along the high Ridge there passed down, down a wee hill and past Bill Curry's house it was on the right. Then you turn down to the left on the Church Brae ... passed the chapel on the right and then turn left, towards the school. And Mary Black's shop and the school ... that's what we did every day."

**Hugh O'Donnell**

"Two teachers then, I can remember them vividly, Sally Black ... she taught the juniors, and they faced North. There was ... one room schoolhouse as I remember it. And the seniors, the older ones, faced the other way, and they were taught by Jack Smith."

**Hugh O'Donnell**



*Willie Glanville (left), John (standing) and Tommy (right) in a wheelbarrow at the East Lighthouse, courtesy of Ellen Glanville*



*St Mary's Primary School, Rathlin Island, courtesy of Ellen Glanville*

*Back Row (L to R): Sally Black (Teacher), Ronnie McCurdy, William Glanville, Thomas Glanville, Michael McCuaig.*

*Front Row (L to R) – Jim Curry, Junior Armstrong, Sean McCuaig, Joe McQuilkin, Vincent Cecil, Teresa McCurdy, Kathleen McCurdy, Freda Curry, Rosie Black, Maureen McCuaig.*

"...the house I'm in is the family home which is about half a mile from the East lighthouse, we are the nearest neighbour to the East lighthouse ... I think one of the strongest memories is that there was always seemed to be somebody, some of the keepers from the East, down here at the house and, and whether that was collecting milk, eggs my mother used to give them. And down at the foot of the avenue there's a part of the wall had a little inset like a hole in it. So, the milk and eggs would have been left there for the keepers to collect."

**Patricia McCurdy**



*Patricia McCurdy, by Tom McDonnell*

"He [my grandfather, William Campbell] served there from the 17/11/1925 to the 1st June 1930. So I grew up with, with a lot of stories of Rathlin ... I was very aware that there was one aunt that I never knew ... I suppose her proper name was Bridget but she was affectionately known as Bid ... I knew she was buried on the island ... my mother used to say, oh she's buried in the grave of another lighthouse keeper, you know, she didn't have a grave on her own ... I'd been out to the island a few times, but I couldn't find out any records about her, about her life or indeed her death."

**Liam Campbell**

"There was a little girl in the McCurdy plot called Bríd that we would have always said a prayer for, and her family had been based at the East lighthouse, her dad was a lighthouse keeper and she died while he was based at the East lighthouse."

**Marianne Green**



*Liam Campbell, courtesy of Liam Campbell*



*Marianne Green, by Tom McDonnell*

"Our house actually would've been a lighthouse house that my daddy bought, many years ago when they were selling the houses after the families had left ... He bought that, so the stairs in our houses came from the lighthouse and the slates in the house are lighthouse house and the doors they were the big heavy doors, there were brass handles on the doors."

**Marina McMullan**

"I remember going up and ... there was a TV there and of course we have no TV at home or no word of a TV at home at that stage and it was great excitement we were all watching a film that we settled down and were allowed to watch with them and it was called Shenandoah and to this day I love that film and I remember sitting up at East Lighthouse watching that film, it was probably the first film ever I watched on TV ... That was one of my first memories up at the East Lighthouse."

**Margaret McQuilkin**



*Marina McMullan,  
by Tom McDonnell*



*Margaret McQuilkin,  
by Tom McDonnell*

"I'll go over the ones that I can ... Ambrose Armstrong, Jack Glanville, and a man called Higginbottom, Fred James and the two O'Donnell's - Paddy O'Donnell and Dave O'Donnell. Neil Loughrey and Bill Roache and Willy Gillespie, Dick Spencer and Robin Polly and Cathal Meehan and Ted Sullivan, Ronnie Hamilton, Tom Scanlan, and off course Tony Martin and Sean Roddy and that boy Seamus Rohue. ... you know a number of the islanders married lighthouse keepers."

**Jim Curry**

"She [Sally Armstrong nee Quinn] came over in 1936 as a district nurse, she was over there for a year, she was district nurse for the year and then she met her future husband, who was my grandfather [Ambrose Bloxom Armstrong], and they got married."

**Billy Armstrong**



*Martha Murray and Bill  
(Willie) Farren, courtesy of  
the Farren family*



*Back Row: Sally and  
Tommy Glanville. Front  
Row: Dympna and J K  
Glanville, courtesy of Ellen  
Glanville. Both families  
spent time stationed at  
the East Lighthouse.*



*Sean and Maureen Roddy,  
courtesy of Cathy Roddy*



"My first date with Paddy [Cleary], the first time I met him was outside Mary Black's shop after Mass."

**Jean Cleary**

"Even going back to the dances there, Jean would drag me around the floor. One of the things I noticed that one of the first dances I was with Jean, Danny [Danny Hannaway, Jean's father] was playing the accordion, along with Alex Anderson and Vincent, Lord rest him was playing another night ... the men inside and the women outside ... This tune played and it stopped, but for some reason every time the music stopped I was standing in front of Jean."

**Paddy Cleary**



*Paddy and Jean Cleary, by Tom McDonnell*

"Whenever I had Michelle the first baby ... she was about seven or eight months when he left to go away to work, and that was him away for a month, you know. But I would say it was harder on him going than was on me staying."

**Jean Cleary**

"I'm married to Noel McCurdy. He's my husband, and he was a lighthouse keeper for many years working for Irish Lights ... that's where I met Noel, was actually at the East Lighthouse."

**Teresa McCurdy**



*Teresa and Noel McCurdy, by Tom McDonnell*

"When I did have the babies, the first one, Ciaran, I remember I had to stay in Ballycastle Hospital, in the Dalriada, for nearly a month coming up to Christmas and I barely saw Noel at all. And then, obviously, after baby was born, and we came home, Noel was stationed up at the East and even when he was on duty, I wasn't really able to see him. Though the Principal Keeper ... the late Robin Polly ... He allowed Noel to come down and see me sometimes, when he wasn't on watch ... during the month that Noel was on duty, I was mainly on my own and I was quite young ... times were different then on the island, you know, we didn't have everything that we have here today with the mains electricity."

**Teresa McCurdy**

"They were very much part of the community and took part in any social events that were going on."

**Margaret McQuilkin**

"George [Kavanagh] was supposed to do Santa that year and he went ashore, and the weather got bad, and he couldn't get back again, and they were stuck for Santa. Noel [McCurdy] came up one morning and he said, 'I've a job for you today'. And I said, 'what have you to do?' He said 'no, you are going to do Santa down in the school'. So, I landed down at the school then and what was sitting on the table? Only a wee bottle of Powers, drink that first he says."

**Hugh McBride**

"Whenever the Santa Claus was needed for the children's party, Santa Claus always used to have an accent, that wouldn't be a local accent it would be like a southern accent."

**Marianne Green**

"James Black used to play the music, James Black and Sean McCuaig and Jim Curry used to play music as well."

**Bill Farren**

"It was the bigger room or bigger house they had them [lighthouse dances] there. I don't know how it was organised, but they had the occasional one ... I can remember it being full ... It usually lasted until four or five in the morning ... In those days it was never any bands, but it was always local men that supplied the music and one way or the other. Dan Smyth, Jack McCurdy, Alex McQuilkin, Joe McCurdy. Even way back in the days of George King playing the fiddle and Mick Anderson. And as time went on Frank McCurdy, Sean McCuaig and myself for a while."

**Jim Curry**

"They used to say there were great dances at the lighthouse, years back, you know. It was all the Lighthouse dance - I think that's what they were called ... I suppose the families were there and the groups and it was a great thing for going up to."

**Marina McMullan**

"My father used to tell a story, whenever they were young they used to go up there for ceilidhs, like dances and they were in a room upstairs in one of the smaller houses and they used to be up there and maybe have a half set going and if they jumped at all they hit their head of the ceiling it was so low."

**Margaret McQuilkin**

"The light keepers and islanders got on well you know, they got on well. But the younger Rathlin men perhaps were a wee bit jealous, you know. The light keepers they had a bit more money in their pocket and they would all have nice shiny new bicycles with lights on them, and bells on them, and the Rathlin young boy he had an aul' bike you know, and it was maybe not just so good. And the young ladies, I think it was a bit like having a Ferrari, and a mini, you know?"

**Jim Curry**

"In those days most of the lightkeepers a lot of them came from Dublin or somewhere and they all came back and they had their deodorants and their aftershaves and things like that, whereas the Rathlin boys maybe hadn't."

**Jim Curry**

## The end of an era: the lighthouse families leaving the island

"I still look after the East lighthouse and it's sad to see just how much it has changed in my lifetime, when you had the families living up there."

**Noel McCurdy**

"The policy was on that they would make these stations relieving with just keepers there and then the keepers could rent their own house or buy their own house wherever it was and stay in the one place ... a lot of keepers at that stage, didn't like the idea of carting their children around Ireland. A lot of them wanted a base, a house and a base so the children could ... go to that school and go to a school further, second or third level, they could do that all in the one area ... it was quite challenging for some of them and then some of them maybe would've been at Irish speaking schools and then coming up to the North to an English-speaking school, that was difficult for them."

**Noel McCurdy**

"I mean the families left Rathlin in the 50s so, I would have been at school at home when they all left the island ... it was very sad because some of them, when they were heading off, they weren't going to live in Ballycastle where you would have seen them again, they were moving to maybe the other end of Ireland ... I mean you must remember there were six families, who would have been living on the island, would've went to...the children went to school. They supported the shop, and they would have gone to their respective churches whatever it was. They were really part of the community, so they were greatly missed."

**Noel McCurdy**

"We were all sad because we missed them ... All the families moving out like that."

**Rosalen Cecil**

## The end of an era: automation at the East Light

"It came in bits and pieces, they started doing some automating in the 80s and then I think into the early 90s they made a full automation programme. They put in new generators, new lights, everything and it was running for about two years when they knew then it was safe to ... So, by 1995, the station was automated, and the keepers were withdrawn."

**Noel McCurdy**

"It [automation] was unusual in the fact that there was no, there was no watches to keep or anything like that ... It was strange. The light just came on and went off itself ... we were basically surplus to requirement."

**Sean O'Donnell**

"At the time I thought it [automation] was a good idea, but I'm not sure now. It was nice to see the keepers there, there was a friendly face to meet you. But then when it went automatic, you went out, nobody there, it was a different set up altogether."

**Hugh McBride**

"Captain Kinsella came up and he did the decommissioning ... we went down to the gate, I got out to close the gate and I turned the key and I looked back up ... I was bawling, thinking about all the people, for the last hundred and 50 years that have walked through that gate, women, children, keepers, you know, families, and now, it was all gone."

**Sean O'Donnell**

"[It was] very much part of the community, you know. She [Dora McCurdy] always lamented them when the lighthouse closed, when it went automatic and the older people were very, you know they were great when change came - like new boats and things like that. But, I think the closing down of the lighthouse was the end of an era for them and I know she really did miss them when it closed ... it was a big part of the island, a big part of it, an era was gone."

**Patricia McCurdy**

"They had a wee bit of a farewell party now before they closed down the lighthouse and that was a joyful occasion but a sad occasion too."

**Margaret McQuilkin**

"When you were coming home from school on the boat on a very bad day, you know you always really felt reassured ... you always thought there was someone at the lighthouse and they are maybe keeping a wee eye out and you always felt that wee bit safer. But that's not going to happen now, automatics won't see us coming on a boat."

**Margaret McQuilkin**

"A way of life gone, you know."

**Sean Roddy**

## The future: Re-opening the gates

"We'd love to see any of the keepers or their families coming back and it's lovely to meet the families and see how they are all getting on now."

**Margaret McQuilkin**

"There is so much history connected to the East Lighthouse ... the East is within easy walking distance for people from the harbour ... I just think it'd be lovely to have it back to life again."

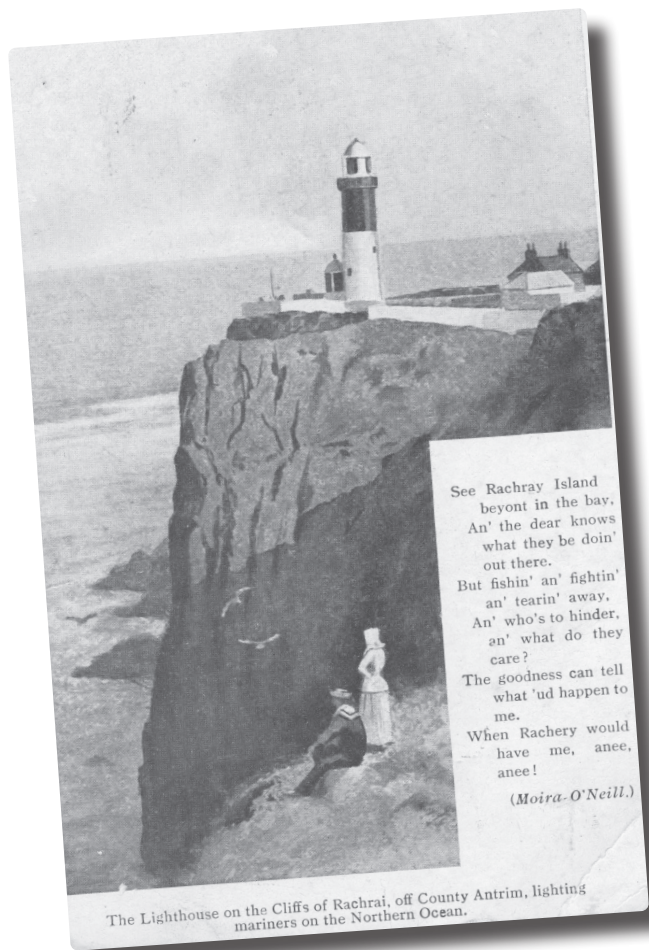
**Patricia McCurdy**

"The walk up to the lighthouse is the walk that I do nearly every day that's my favourite walk, I mean it's just so beautiful up there at the East lighthouse."

**Teresa McCurdy**

"I hope that the generations coming after me will have lots of memories about the East Light as well. There's so many opportunities, hopefully that we will get to use it again and get to see people in it ... They are definitely a loss, the lighthouse keepers would've always brought something unique to the island so, it'll be good to have a new set of people coming to the island and bringing their uniqueness."

**Marianne Green**



Old postcard of Rathlin East Lighthouse

## 'There will always be a light'

"The lighthouse flashes straight in the window in the front, into my bedroom and if I haven't the curtains on, out through the window opposite out into the garden. And that goes on all night, I'm so well used to it, you know if it stopped, I would notice it in my sleep ... There will always be a light."

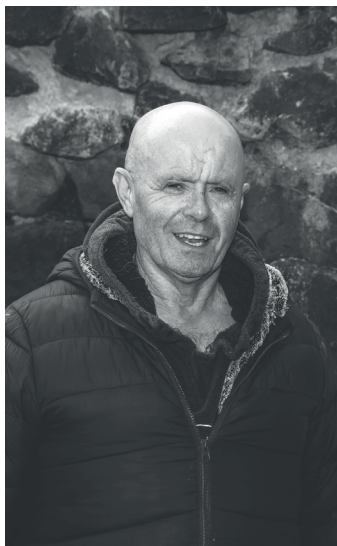
Loughie McCuaig



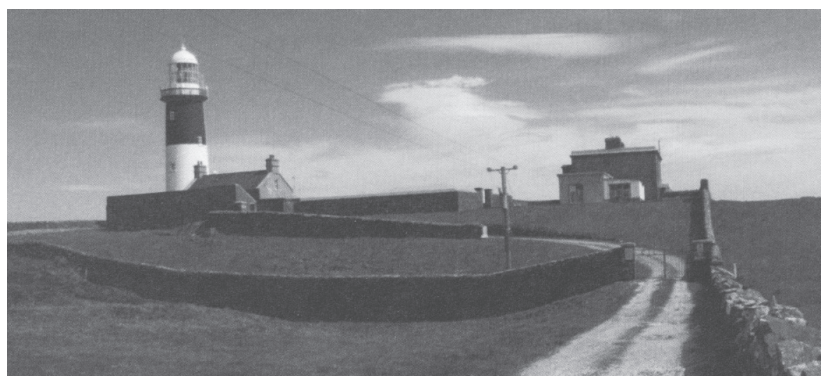
Loughie McCuaig, by Tom McDonnell



*Gerald McCurdy,  
by Tom McDonnell*



*Francis McGinn,  
by Tom McDonnell*



*East Light, courtesy of Margaret McQuilkin*

## List of interviewees

**Billy Armstrong**, grandson of a lighthouse keeper

**Liam Campbell**, grandson of a lighthouse keeper

**Mary Cecil**, islander & wife of a lighthouse attendant

**Rosaleen Cecil**, islander & wife of a lighthouse attendant

**Jean Cleary**, islander & wife of a lighthouse keeper

**Paddy Cleary**, lighthouse keeper

**Richard Cummins**, lighthouse keeper

**Jim Curry**, islander

**Bill Farren**, lighthouse keeper

**Alan Glanville**, supernumery

**Ellen Glanville**, daughter of a lighthouse keeper

**William Glanville**, son of a lighthouse keeper

**Marianne Green**, islander

**Alex Hamilton**, lighthouse keeper

**Ncil Loughrey**, son of a lighthouse keeper

**Anne McAuley**, islander & schoolfriend of lighthouse children

**Hugh McBride**, Irish Lights tradesman

**Loughie McCuaig**, islander & temporary keeper

**Gerald McCurdy**, islander & lighthouse keeper

**Noel McCurdy**, islander, lighthouse keeper and current attendant

**Patricia McCurdy**, islander & sister of lighthouse keepers

**Teresa McCurdy**, islander & wife of a lighthouse keeper

**Francis McGinn**, Ballycastle man & mainland transport provider

**Marina McMullan**, islander

**Margaret McQuilkin**, islander

**Hugh O'Donnell**, son of a lighthouse keeper

**Patrick O'Donnell**, son of a lighthouse keeper

**Sean O'Donnell**, lighthouse keeper

**Sean Roddy**, lighthouse keeper

# Rathlin Island Oral History Group

**Members:** Jessica Bates, Jennifer McCurdy, John McCurdy, Noel McCurdy, Marina McMullan, and Margaret McQuilkin.



*L to R: Marina McMullan, Jessica Bates, Margaret McQuilkin at the East Light, by Tom McDonnell*



*John and Jennifer McCurdy at Ushet Lough, by Tom McDonnell*



*Noel McCurdy at the East Light, by Tom McDonnell*



*Arthur Mclvor, courtesy of Arthur Mclvor*



*Margot McCuaig, courtesy of Margot McCuaig*

# Acknowledgements

A huge thank you to everyone who participated and shared their stories and memories as part of this project. This book contains only a fragment of the material collected.

The Rathlin Oral History Group would like to thank and acknowledge the support of the Rathlin Development and Community Association and in particular David Quinney Mee and Stephen Ryan in the Rathlin Resource Centre; Commissioners of Irish Lights; the Department for Communities, NI; and the Heritage Lottery. The project was undertaken with funding from the Community Heritage Fund, which The National Lottery Heritage Fund administered on behalf of the Department for Communities. The publication of this book was made possible with funding from Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council Cultural Arts and Heritage grants scheme.

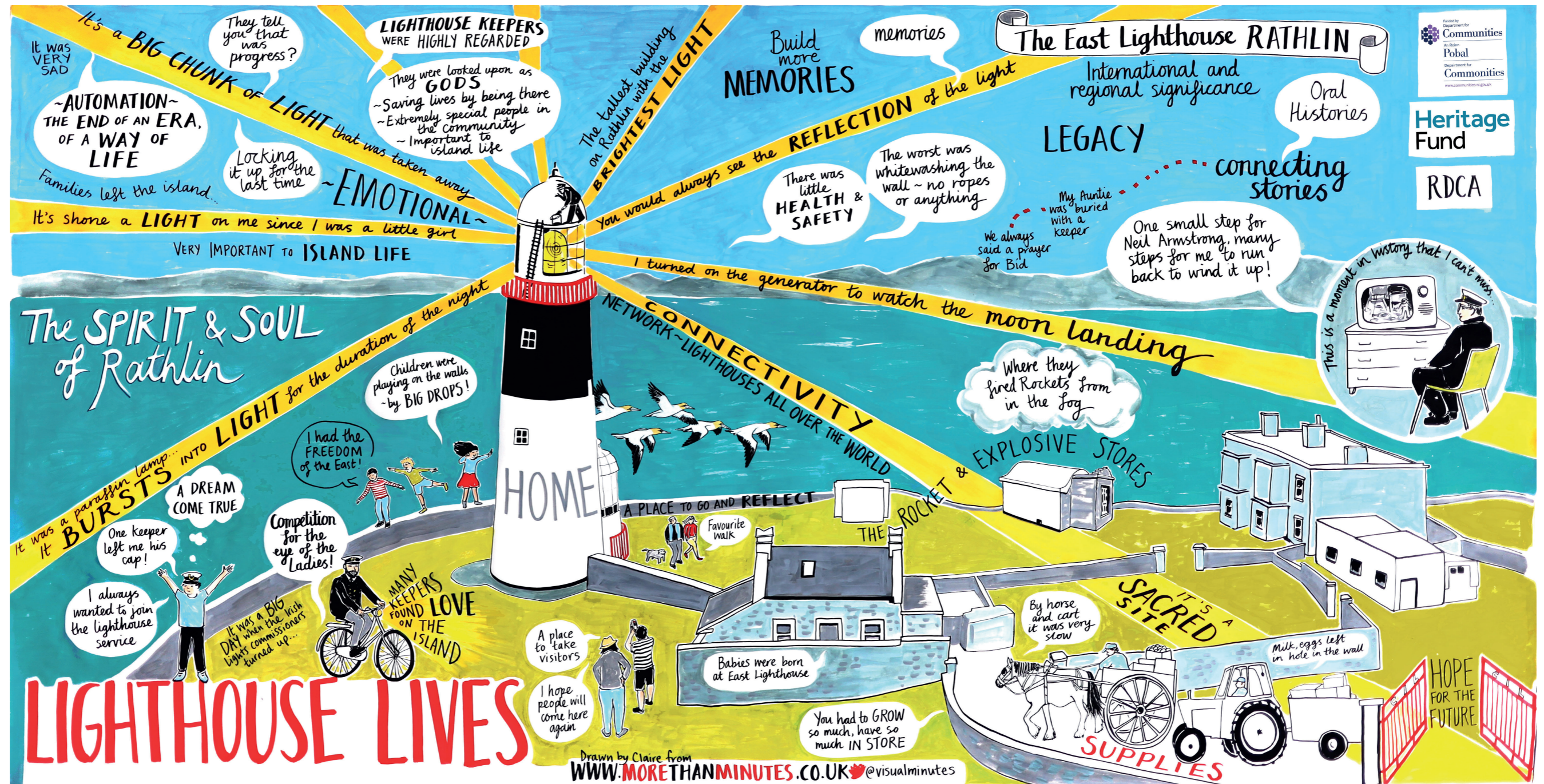
Thanks also to Professor Arthur Mclvor, Margot McCuaig and Dr Nic Wright for their guidance; to oral history group member Dr Jessica Bates who brought her professional expertise to collecting and managing the material and to producing this book; and to purpleTV and Margot McCuaig for the film of Noel McCurdy at the East Light; More than Minutes and Claire Stringer for the visual minutes; Tom McDonnell for the professional photographs; and Dr Allison Campbell for all the transcription work.

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Lives project, created by More Than Minutes  
 Visual minutes from the Rathlin Lighthouse





# Lighthouses of Ireland



## Rathlin Lighthouse Lives: The Spirit and Soul of Rathlin East

Stories and memories about  
Rathlin East Lighthouse and those who  
worked and lived there.

Rathlin Island Oral History Group