

# Welcome aboard "Ps Waverley" for "THE LIGHT OF THE LOUGH CRUISE" 1824 – 2024



Launching NMA Haulbowline  
Lighthouse Bi-Centennial Project.  
Wednesday 29th May 2024.

Compiled by James McAreevey

# Haulbowline Lighthouse.

NI Number: CIL 1020.



Early Morning Arrival at Haulbowline  
Photography by Ann Bruen

**Mariners have many hazards to contend with at the entrance to Carlingford Lough, a narrow channel, dangerous submerged rocks, and a rocky shoal or Bar at the mouth of the waterway. A lighthouse on Cranfield Point was deemed inadequately sited due to the number of wrecks nearby. The Port of Newry in the early 19th century was a hub of global trade and the merchants of Newry lobbied the Ballast Board in Dublin, the Lighthouse Authority before the establishment of Irish Lights in 1867, to have it replaced.**

That their demands were successful, underscores the importance of the Port of Newry and the influence wielded by its traders. The Ballast Board agreed to the construction of a new wave-washed lighthouse on the Haulbowline Rocks off Cranfield and work began in 1817 under the direction of George Halpin (SNR). The building of the lighthouse on a semi-submerged rock surrounded by fast-flowing currents was acknowledged as a fantastic achievement. Even today, with modern technology and equipment such a project would present a considerable challenge and Haulbowline stands tall after 200 years as a tribute to the skillsets and tenacity of George Halpin and his team.

Haulbowline Lighthouse was completed in 1824 with the first light exhibited on 1st September that year. The facility takes its name from a Norse word meaning, "Haunt of the Eels". The lighthouse, described as, "An elegant, tapering stone tower", stands at 34 metres and cost £28,242 to build which equates to over £300 million today !!!.

The lighthouse was manned by 3 keepers with a man ashore. The keepers continued to live in the old cottages at Cranfield Point, which survived after the original lighthouse collapsed into the sea in 1860, due to coastal erosion. Eventually, The Commissioners of Irish Lights built new houses in Greencastle for the men stationed on Haulbowline.

There are 8 floors within the granite tower which was originally painted white. In 1946 the stone was brought back to its original colour and remains so today.

George Halpin was also responsible for the building of a small lighthouse at Greenore, 36ft, with keepers cottages. This little lighthouse highlighted the entrance to Greenore Port and was opened in 1830. The light was discontinued in 1986 and the facility closed.

On St Patrick's Day 1965, Haulbowline made the national headlines when it became the first lighthouse to be automated. After 141 years the keepers were withdrawn, an attendant appointed, and the lighthouse was remotely monitored and controlled from the shore. The attendant also assumed responsibility for the leading lights at Greencastle and these were solarised in 1999.



Greenore Lighthouse

The sweeping turning light was abolished on 16th July 2008 and replaced with a fixed flashing LED light and this was followed by the decommissioning of the foghorn on 8th January 2009. The range of the light was reduced to 10 Nautical miles on 1st July 2011 and the attendant retired in 2022. Today the lighthouse is fully controlled by CIL from their headquarters in Dun Laoghaire.



Peyton Cunningham, Captain Sean Cunningham, Lighthouse Attendant and the late Paddy Mc Cann (NMA) in the lamp room on Haulbowline in August 2016.

Photography by  
Ann Bruen



# Haulbowline Bi-Centennial Project.

Presently, we are engaged with various groups and individuals around the Lough to create a small program of events in the weeks leading up to the illumination of the tower beginning on Friday 2nd August. Details will be posted on social media and the local press.

We wish to thank,  
The Commissioners of Irish Lights for facilitating our illumination event.  
The Braham Group, led by Thomas Braham, for hosting the event.  
Warrenpoint Port for their generous support and Corporate Membership.  
Captain Sean Cunningham and his brother, Thomas for coordinating the logistical support.

Special thanks to Maud Hamill and Chris Cassidy for their detailed research.  
We wish Haulbowline a Very Happy 200th birthday.



## The Port of Newry.

**The origins of the Port can be traced back to the arrival of Cistercian monks in the 12th century and the building, at the behest of the Newry merchants, of Haulbowline Lighthouse in 1824. The monks in Newry traded with other monasteries using small wicker boats known as Cogs.**

Originally tidal, the port of Newry was accessed by the Clanrye River and its growing importance was reflected by the relocation of the Customs and Excise from Carlingford to Newry in 1726.

The discovery of coal in Co. Tyrone led to the building of the Newry Inland Canal to facilitate the export of the produce by sea to Dublin. The waterway opened in 1742 and access to the river was via a lock situated opposite Quay Street; flourishing trade led merchants to demand facilities for larger ships. A ship canal adjoining the inland canal was cut through to Fathom opening in 1769; ships entered and exited the canal via Fortescues Lock, named after the architect John



Fortesque. Newry was now an international trading centre with ships coming from and going to all parts of the world. A host of industries looked to the canal for the import of raw materials and as a conduit for the export of their produce. Newry was a thriving industrial market town. There were a variety of mills, markets, quarries, distilleries, breweries and tanneries.

There were glass works, foundries, brick works and even a sugar making plant. In 1850 a further extension was made to the ship canal and Sir John Rennie also deepened the channel at Narrow Water. The present day Victoria Locks were opened and the canal as we know it today was complete. Eclipsed first by rail and then road, the canal went into terminal decline and closed to commercial traffic in March 1974.

# Jimmy Haffey, Reflections

Those of us of a certain vintage will have fond memories of the legendary Jimmy Haffey who was a teacher of History and Geography in the Abbey Grammar School, Newry from 1950 to 1984. His Father and extended family were employed by the local firm of coal importers and shipowners, Joseph Fisher & Sons. Jimmy was a founder member and key contributor to NMA and passed away in 2017, aged 90. Below is a piece which he wrote for a NMA event in 2012.



**Looking back over the last 70 odd years the reality of the change in our lifestyle is quite remarkable. Days past are all too sadly reflected in the derelict Newry Canal and Albert Basin.**

The importance of the Canal to the local community and the economy was quite apparent to me from an early age. My grandfather, James McShane, and five of his six sons worked as stevedores at the docks, all employed by Fisher's. Up to seventy-two men were engaged in digging coal from the ships holds into large tubs for discharge. One of my boyhood tasks was to bring glass bottles of tea and bread from home to my grandfather and uncles.

The canteen was a pile of coal and they sat down and ate, glad to get it. The port was a hub of activity with ships discharging and legions of men with black faces milling around. Often as many as seven or eight ships could be in the port and there were railway stations at Dublin Bridge and Bridge Street. The port was an important mainstay in employment not just in Newry but the surrounding rural areas as well. The road I was reared on, the Oul Road, or Hillhead Road as it is today, was an arterial route to Fathom and men would be walking past our house from as early as 4am to work in the docks. Pubs in the area, Caseys, Dornans, McVeighs, Dowdalls, Hollywoods, and Murtaghs did great trade with port workers and seamen. Little shops like Kanes, Murphys, McCellands, Petie Loughran and Loyles were the forerunners of the modern supermarket.

Today the port is no more. Those pubs and shops, and those who frequented them, have all gone. The railways too have disappeared and the once busy 'Oul Road' has been closed due to subsidence. The change is quite remarkable but is it any better?



# George Halpin (SNR) Inspector of Lighthouses.

**A Stonemason by trade with no formal qualifications in engineering, George Halpin became "The Father of Irish Lighthouses".**

Little is known of his formative years growing up in Wicklow but 1779 is generally acknowledged as the year he was born. However, his achievements and burgeoning Cv are jaw-dropping. At the age of 21 he was appointed as Inspector of Works for the Ballast Board which was responsible for major projects in Dublin Port. A plethora of schemes were delivered on Halpins watch, most notably, the construction of the mile-long North Bull Wall.

In 1810 the Ballast Board assumed responsibility for lighthouses and appointed George as Inspector of Lighthouses as well as Inspector of Works. The estate numbered just 14 lighthouses and Mr Halpin immediately began to modernise these facilities. Over the next 44 years George Halpin designed and supervised the construction of over 50 lighthouses including Haulbowline and its little brother at Greenore. In 1830 his son, George (JNR) was appointed as his assistant. Young George was a qualified engineer who succeeded his Father after his sudden passing. George Halpin (SNR) died suddenly on 8th July 1854 whilst carrying out a lighthouse inspection, aged 75. He is interred with his wife, Elizabeth, in Mount Jerome Cemetery, Dublin.

George (JNR) was bedevilled by ill health which forced him to retire at the age of 62. Sadly he died just 3 years later in 1869 at 65 and he too lies in Mount Jerome.

The remarkable portfolio of George (SNR) tends to be overshadowed by a nephew, Robert Halpin 1836-1894. A Master Mariner aged 22, Robert is remembered for the successful laying of 26,000 miles of Marine Telegraph Cable revolutionising communications. In 1866 he completed the laying of 2,600 miles of Trans Atlantic cable between Valentia Island and Newfoundland. This connection has never been interrupted.



# Team Cunningham.

## The Conduit for Safety on the Lough for a Century.

**The worst-ever tragedy to impact our community occurred on the night of Friday 3rd November 1916. The inward-bound Newry collier, "SS Retriever" collided with the outward-bound, "SS Connemara", in "The Cut", the narrow shipping channel just south of Haulbowline.**

As the keepers watched helplessly, 94 souls perished and both ships sank. Incredibly, the sole survivor, James Boyle from "SS Retriever", was a non-swimmer.

Shortly after the Board of Trade Inquiry, pilotage on the Lough became compulsory and the name of the Cunningham family from Greencastle resonates with this unique skill.



Pilot Boats at Greencastle

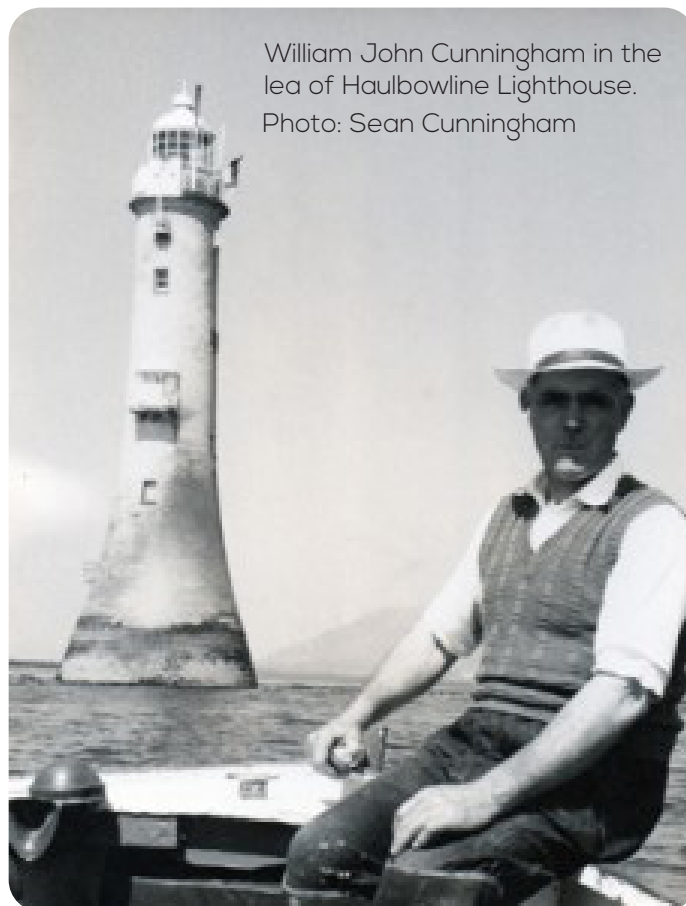
William John Cunningham was a pilot on the Lough for over 4 decades, a tough and dangerous occupation in spartan conditions. His son Sean, a pilot and lighthouse attendant for 45 years, recalls the hardship. "A telegram would arrive from a ship's agent advising of her arrival and we went out to meet her in an open boat unprotected from the elements and waited. There was no form of communication and in fact, we didn't get a VHF radio until 1974 when the Newry Canal closed and we got the radio from Victoria Lock.

William John was also the boatman who brought supplies to Haulbowline twice weekly on Tuesday and Thursday. When the lighthouse was automated in March 1965, CLC appointed him as Attendant. He brought the last ship to the port of Newry on 26th March 1974 and when he departed the Newry Canal with the empty Dutch tanker, Anna Broere" the next day the commercial Port of Newry closed. William John passed away in 1975 but his legacy continues.

His son Sean succeeded him as pilot and lighthouse attendant until retirement and his brother Thomas is also retired having completed a 51 years tenure with Carlingford Lough Commissioners (CLC). As Harbour Master at Greencastle, he was responsible for maintaining the buoyed channel from The Bar to Victoria Lock.

Carlingford Lough Pilots are responsible for pilotage on the Lough today with 3 pilots. The firm is led by the youngest son of William John, Chief Pilot Leo Cunningham. Leo is assisted by his sons, Michael and Paul and they operate 2 Pilot Boats and 3 tugs to provide a 24-hour service to ships utilising the ports of Greenore and Warrenpoint.

Times have changed from the open boats of the William John era but the ethos of "Safety on the Water" is maintained with "Team Cunningham" at the helm.



William John Cunningham in the lea of Haulbowline Lighthouse.  
Photo: Sean Cunningham

# "Ps Waverley" Visits Warrenpoint. National Flagship of the Year 2024.



**Warrenpoint Harbour Authority pulled off something of a coup when they secured a visit to the Port by the oldest sea-going paddle steamer, "Waverley", last year.**

The ship was built on the Clyde and made her maiden voyage on 16th June 1947. The beautiful old lady brought a full compliment of passengers for an evening trip on the Lough and what a pleasure it was. There was a Mediterranean atmosphere as we ploughed through the shimmering calm waters of Carlingford Lough which was bathed in the resplendent rays of the evening sun on Tuesday 30th May.

**Now "Waverley" has returned for 2 scheduled cruises and we are indebted to Warrenpoint Port for permitting us to utilise this cruise to launch our Bi-Centennial Project.**

Waverley entered service in 1947 and was the last paddle steamer built for service on the Clyde, for operator London and North Eastern Railway. In the following year due to Nationalisation of Railways, the vessel became part of the Caledonian Steam Packet Company (CSP) until 1972, a year before the the company became Caledonian MacBrayne Ltd (CalMac).

Following a major public appeal, the Waveley re-entered service in 1973 after the vessel was gifted for £1 and officially handed over to Waverley Steam Navigation Co. Ltd., a company formed by the Paddle Steamer Preservation Society.

Since 1975 Waverley has carried over 6 million passengers and earned herself a loyal following in several areas around the UK including the South Coast and Thames. More recently in 2019 a public appeal raised £2.3m to replace the steam boilers and save the vessel from withdrawal.

**A big thank you to our Corporate Member, Warrenpoint Port, for this marvellous community initiative and fingers crossed we will see "PS Waverley" in Warrenpoint again.**