

## The Lighthouse Keeper's Daily Routine

The Light keeper worked a shift of four hours on and eight hours off.  
The rota ran as follows;

0600 to 1000	1800 to 2200
1000 to 1400	2200 to 0200
1400 to 1800	0200 to 0600

Whilst on watch the light keeper carried out the following duties:

- Radio listening watch on distress channels (VHF channel 16 and Radio Telephone 2182 khz) and working channels.
- Weather readings every hour at fog signal stations and every four hours when handing over to the next keeper. These readings were wind direction and speed, sea state, barometer pressure, temperature, visibility and present weather conditions.
- Visual watch for any imminent danger and checking for visibility in case fog signal needed to be activated.
- Constant checks on all navigational aids such as radio beacons, lights, and fog signals.
- If generator standby engines should come into service, a check was kept on oil pressures, ensuring that the engine was running correctly e.g. making sure that no unnecessary vibration or oil leaks occurred.
- The light keeper was always on standby for assisting helicopters, lifeboats, and any services that would require assistance in the help of saving lives. This was a totally unofficial coastguard type duty that was not part of the light keeper's remit.

This daily routine was carried out for 28 days consecutively, followed by 28 days 'off' when the light keeper would return to his home and family.

During the period of time when the light keeper was not on watch, he was expected to maintain the navigation aids, e.g. changing lights and checking that the characters were correct. ('Character' means the sequence in which the light would flash i.e. Mizen light character being 2 seconds on and 2 seconds off and the Fastnet being 1 flash every 5 seconds, thus the mariner could differentiate between the different stations). As with lights, the fog signals were also characterised. They had to be timed, with the correct sound and sequence, so mariners could identify each station in dense fog and so avoid the danger of rocks or headlands.

Lighthouses also had 'day marks', which were usually large sea walls, which were painted white. The white wall would highlight the lighthouse so that by day the mariner could identify the lighthouse by the colours and at night by the light and in fog, the fog signal.

The light keeper would also be accountable to the Commissioners of Irish Lights to maintain their property. The light keeper was expected to always be dressed in uniform while on duty so dignitaries or members of the public who had permission to visit the station could see that a high standard was consistently maintained.

The light keeper on outlying rock stations would have the same duties as mentioned above, but would have extra responsibilities such as:

- Trapping rainwater into tanks for domestic use and drinking,
- Maintaining boat landings and helicopter pads.
- Maintaining battery banks and generator engines.
- Maintaining derricks, hoists and cranes.
- Maintaining ropes and slings for lifting.
- Ensuring all first aid essentials were up to date and correctly stored for emergencies.

The light keeper had many hobbies during his hours on watch and when he was not carrying out maintenance duties around the station.

These hobbies could be seen as whiling away the long hours, but it was also a way of subsidising his income. There was many a light keeper, who put ships in bottles, made furniture, modelled ships, caught and salted fish for the markets. There were those also with a more spiritual nature, born of being at one with nature and the wild seas, who read, painted and wrote poetry, songs or prose.

*'For in the whisperings of the white lipp'd foam*

*My heart is wafted up, dull care away;*

*I rise, a worker knowing life's a poem,*

*And happiness pervades my simple day.'*

D.J.O'Sullivan Light Keeper

'Light-Keeper's Lyrics' 1947

©SOS 2010