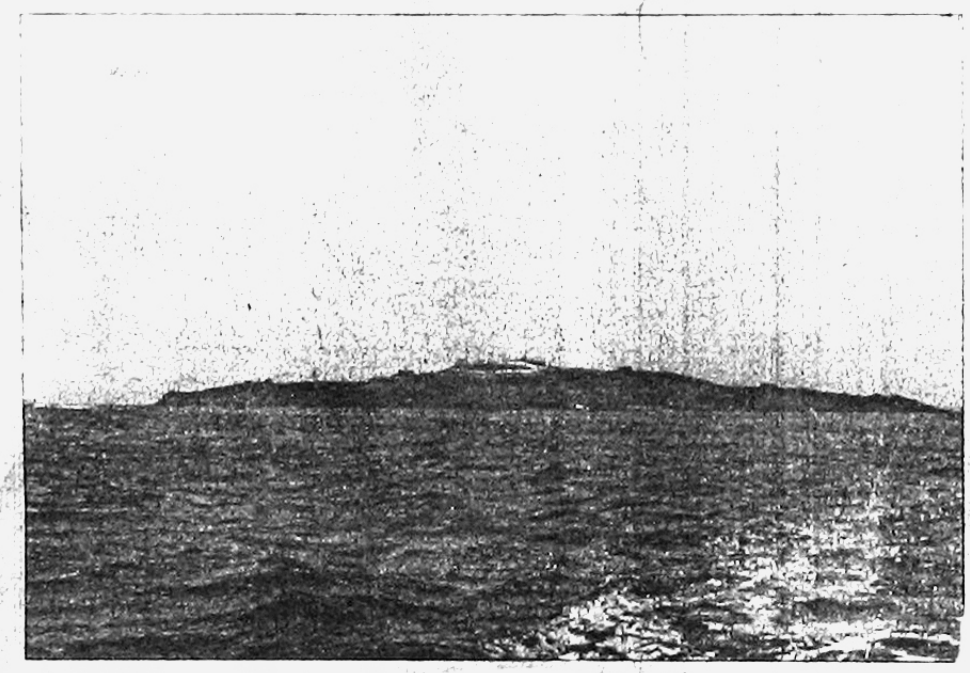
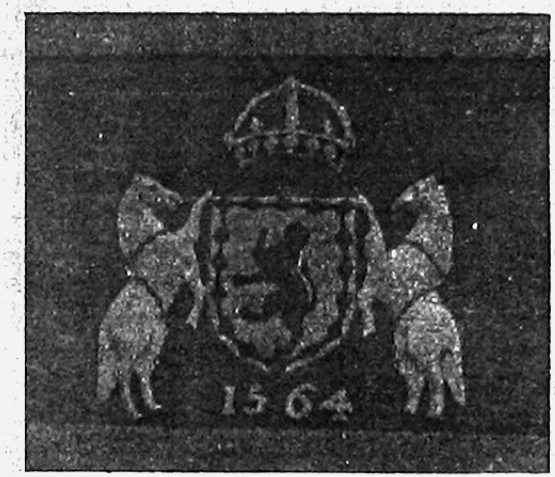


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ISBN 0 946 201 42 0

L'île DES Chevaux



THE STORY OF INCHKEITH

DAVID A. MARSHALL



INTRODUCTION

"L'ile des chevaux" - "Island of Horses" - was the name given to Inchkeith by the French troops garrisoned there in the mid-16th century because their horses seemed to thrive on the grass. Mary of Guise, visiting the island, also had her own name for it - "L'ile Dieu" (God's Island).

The names are romantic, as is the history of this rock situated in the Firth of Forth between the Fife town of Kinghorn (into which parish the island falls) and the port of Leith. It stands at a height of about 180 ft. above sea level at its highest point, where a lighthouse is perched, and is nearly 1 mile long and, on average, $\frac{1}{4}$ mile wide.

There is slight evidence for prehistoric inhabitation, but the authenticity of writings regarding the Dark Age period of the island's history is sceptical. From the 15th century onwards, however, the island has seldom seen a quiet moment. It has played its own small part in the major affairs of Scottish political and maritime history, has been bombarded with missiles of hate, has had its skin gashed by pick and shovel, yet it still stands aloof with the sea quietly licking its wounds.

Even today, the island may exude an air of desolation upon the visitor. Standing on the highest point and looking around, one can imagine those melancholy thoughts of past inhabitants gazing out at the hills of Fife, then over at the town of Edinburgh, with the sad realisation that they were so near and, yet, so far. Even today, access to the island is curbed by the necessity of having written permission to land and the effort of looking for a boat to take one there. But once there, the visitor enters a totally different world, where the air is heavy with the vibrations of wars fought a long time ago, and where the grass seems to quiver and bend beneath unseen feet - such is the magic of the island of Inchkeith!

Four an' twenty Mermaids left the Port o' Leith

To taunt the puir auld Hermit wha' dwelt upon Inchkeith.

No Boat nor Raft, nor Creer nor Craft had they, nor Oars nor Sails,

Their lily Hands were Oars enow, their Tillers were their Tails !

- old Scots Song

HISTORY OF THE ISLAND

Dr. Skene, writing in 1876 says that the tribes of the Otalini and the Gadeni had a northern frontier town called Alauna, which Ptolemy placed in the Firth of Forth. This town, Skene says, "corresponds in situation with the island of Inchkeith". Certainly, the prehistoric period is represented by several chisel-like tools, found on the island.

There is a later story concerning Adamnan, Saint of Cramond Island, Abbot of Iona and biographer of St. Columba. In the 7th century, he is supposed to have met St. Servanus (or St. Serf) on Inchkeith, the latter having come from Rome with some followers to help the Ionian monks with their missionary work. This tale might be disproved on two accounts. Firstly, St. Serf probably had no connections with Rome or the Near East, and secondly, he lived about a century before Adamnan. The story is, however, in keeping with the histories of most of the other Forth islands, which all have their traditional connections with saints, e.g. the Bass Rock and St. Baldred, and the May Isle and St. Adrian. In the year 1010 AD., Malcolm II, King of the Picts (1005-1034), was being so hard-pressed by the Danes that he asked for aid from the Catti Clan of Caithness. The Danes, under Comus, were routed in a fierce battle on the Forfarshire coast and the King rewarded the Catti Chief, Robert de Keith, with a grant of lands, part of which was Inchkeith. This event is regarded as one source from which the name of the island is derived. It is not certain for how long the island was owned by the Keiths (later Earls Marischal), but many sources say that it had reverted to the Crown sometime before the reign of David I (1124-1153). Robert II (1371-1390) was in possession of the island in the late 14th century. He and his first wife, Elizabeth Mure of Rowallan, had several daughters, and Sir John Lyon, Clerk and Chamberlain at the Royal Court, and Thane of Glamis, fell in love with one of them, the Princess Johanne de Keith. They married secretly

and, although the King may have been annoyed, he gave the marriage his blessing and gifted Inchkeith to his new son-in-law. This story of the Princess Johanne de Keith provides another source for the derivation of the island's name.

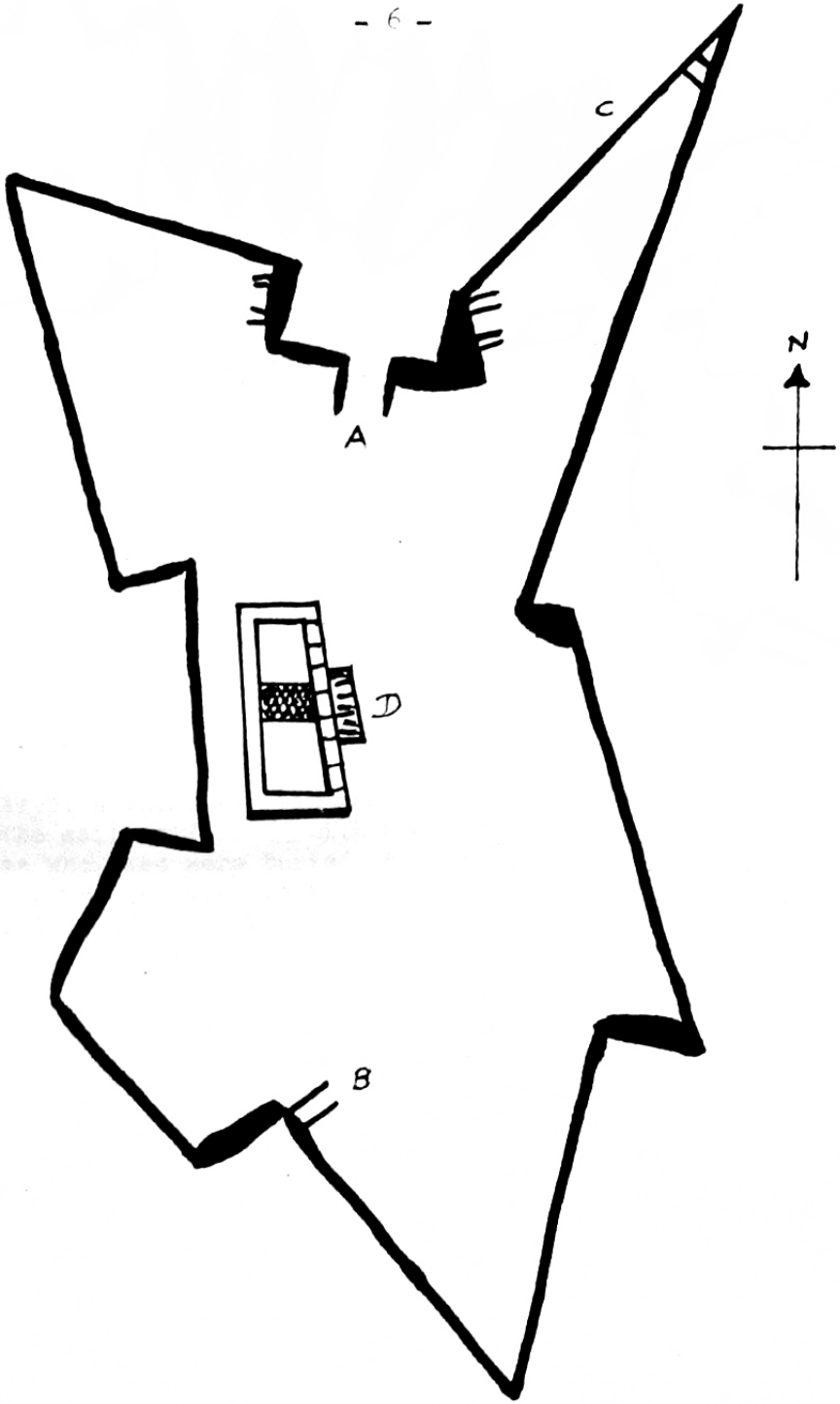
Nothing of interest then seems to occur upon or in connection with Inchkeith until the reign of James IV (1488-1513). He is supposed to have carried out a strange experiment by housing on the island a deaf and dumb woman, and two infants. The object of this exercise was to find out which language the children would grow up to speak. The results of the experiment are not known for certain but it was reckoned by some that they spoke Hebrew!

One definite event during the reign of James IV, however, is that, in the year 1497, the Edinburgh Privy Council, under orders from the King, instructed the Magistrates to assemble all those suffering from plague (Grandgore) on Leith Sands and transport them to Inchkeith, where a "Hospital" was to be built for them. The King also had a falconer stationed on the island, where hawks for the hunts were kept. James IV was such an innovator and a man with great ideas that he might have added considerably more to the island's colourful history had he not met his death at the battle of Flodden in 1513.

Under his successor, James V (1513-1542), the island was gifted under the Great Seal to Sir Andrew Wood of Largo, upon the forfeiture of John, Lord Glamis. The famous naval commander was Governor of Inchkeith from 1542-1547, during the first years of the "Rough Wooing", a period which resulted in the young Mary, Queen of Scots, being sent to France, where she later married the Dauphin Francis I. Henceforth, Inchkeith became a military base and this was its main use until after World War II.

Even after Henry VIII died, in 1547, the "Rough Wooing" of Scotland continued. Edward Seymour, Duke of Somerset, Protector for Henry's young son, Edward (whom Henry had intended to marry Mary, Queen of Scots)

marched north with another army. They defeated the Scots at Pinkie and burned many towns and villages (including Edinburgh.) They also seized Inchkeith and erected a fortress there. From this base, they carried out many raids along the shores of Fife and the Lothians, but only succeeded for a very short time (about two years) before French troops sailed from Leith and captured the island. The battle is supposed to have been long and fierce with the dismembered remains of the English being displayed upon the battlements of the fort, much to the pleasure of Mary of Guise, who subsequently visited the island. After the battle, the French proceeded to erect an even stronger fort which was completed in 1564. In that year, Mary, Queen of Scots, visited the island, having returned to Scotland three years previously, and the occasion was commemorated by an inscribed stone bearing her Coat of Arms and the date (see front cover and page 7). Today this stone is located above a gateway in the courtyard of the light-house and is beautifully painted, although the initials have disappeared and only the date remains. (On the death of Mary of Guise in June 1560, all the French troops in Scotland, with the exception of the garrisons at Dunbar and Inchkeith, had surrendered to the Scottish Lords at Leith.) Three years later, in 1567, the fortress was demolished, either to prevent it being used by the English or as a guard against occupation by the supporters of Mary. This demolition was never com-pletely carried out, however, as parts of the fortress still remained in the early 19th century and, indeed, a small section of walling is still visible today, incor-porated into the lighthouse boundary wall. The island became part of the parish of Kinghorn after the Reformation in 1561. In 1580, great alarm was caused in Edinburgh and Leith by the arrival of the ship "William of Leith" from Danzig. The ship was carrying the plague and was ordered by the Edinburgh Privy Council to anchor in the Forth off Inchcolm. The majority of the crew of forty died, but the survivors were landed on Inchgarvie and Inchkeith, where they remained until they had recovered.



OPPOSITE:

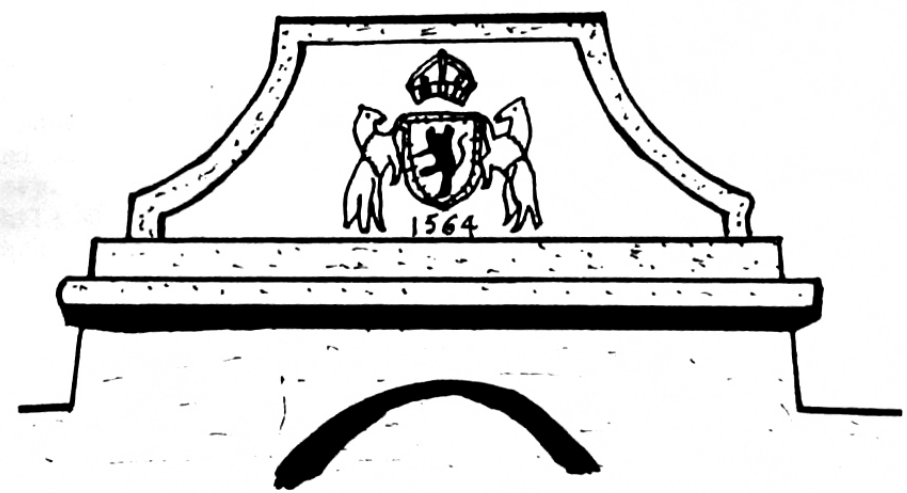
Plan of the 16th century French fortress on Inchkeith. Original in Mylne, R.S., "Master Masons to the Crown of Scotland", or, "The King's Master Masons" - 1893.

A = PRINCIPAL GATEWAY

B = SALLY PORT

C = THE ORIGINAL LOCATION OF THE STONE COMMEMORATING THE VISIT OF MARY, QUEEN OF SCOTS, IN 1564.

D = GUARDHOUSE AND OFFICERS' QUARTERS



In 1612, the island was given to Patrick, Earl of Kinghorn, Lord Lyon and Glamis. In March 1649, it was sold to Sir John Scotstarvet, along with a mill and some other land at Kinghorn, for the sum of 20,000 Scots merks, or thereabouts. His intention was to establish a commercial fishing station on the island and, indeed, the venture was begun, but it failed due to an unusual circumstance. One day, some fishermen were drowned in a storm while crossing the Forth to attend Kinghorn Kirk. Some local women were accused of having called up the storm and were subsequently burned for witchcraft. The Lyons (also called the Strathmores by this time) bought back the island soon afterwards and were in possession of it until Earl Patrick sold it to Sir George MacKenzie of Tarbat. He tried to convince the Government that the re-fortification of Inchkeith would be a worthwhile project but he failed, and sold it to the Duke of Argyll.

In 1793, the island passed to the ownership of the Buccleuch family who kept it until it was sold to the Government in 1890.

In 1799, a Russian fleet was anchored off Leith and some of the sailors fell ill with an infectious disease. Those who died were buried on Inchkeith, and their graves must have been visible for some time because Thomas Carlyle, visiting the island in 1817, mentions them. In 1803 the first lighthouse was erected on Inchkeith.

The island was made a military base again, about 1860, when Lord Herbert of Lea (1810-1861), Secretary of State for War during the reign of Queen Victoria, advised that it should be re-fortified as a precaution against "hostile cruisers". Today there is a large, bronze plaque situated in the rock above the harbour. It reads:-

"IN REMEMBRANCE OF SYDNEY, FIRST LORD HERBERT OF LEA, BORN 1810 DIED 1861. TWICE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WAR."

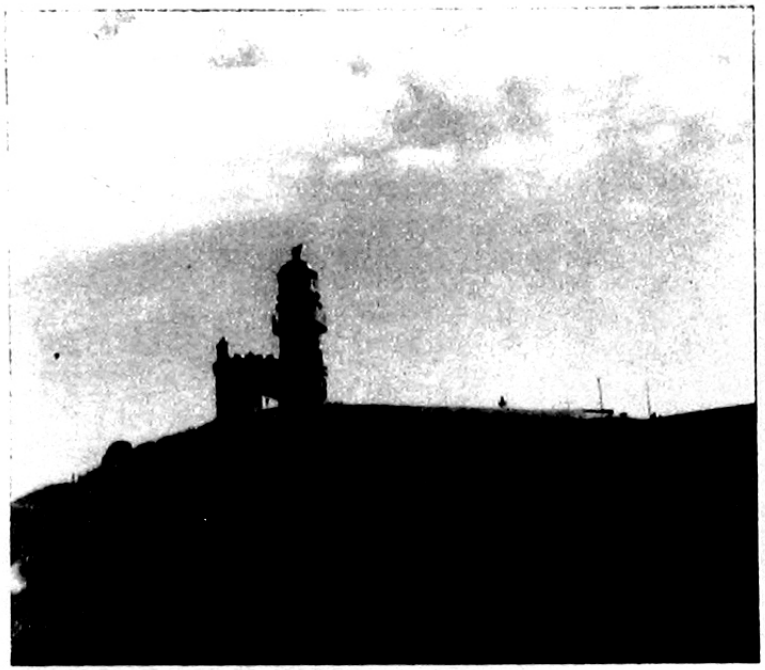
Who was the first member of Government to perceive the necessity of protecting the shores of the Firth of Forth

from the inroads of hostile cruisers and for this purpose took steps for the fortification of the island of Inchkeith. He was the steadfast supporter of Florence Nightingale and the friend of the soldiers of the British Army.

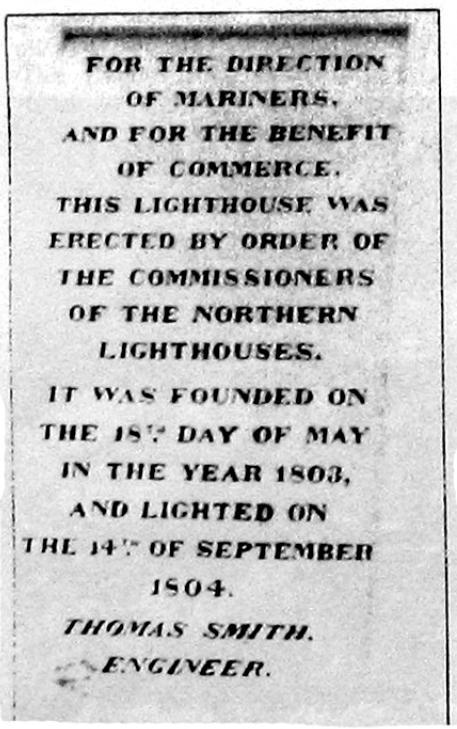
THIS MEMORIAL IS ERECTED BY THE TRUSTEES OF ROBERT MACKAY SMITH, MERCHANT LEITH, IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PROVISIONS OF HIS WILL."

The plaque also bears his Coat of Arms. The Leith merchants had been arguing for the defence of their port for more than 25 years before the work was eventually undertaken, and Lord Sydney Herbert had been an early supporter of their cause. The plaque is now a listed monument.

Between 1878 and 1881, three gun batteries were built on the North-West, North-East and South headlands, but only two of these are visible today. They are constructed of rubble and are partly subterranean. The North-West battery has an inscribed lintel - V R 1880. Although the plans were drawn up by a Col. John Terbury Muggridge, they were actually based on sketches made about 20 years earlier, and the contractors were Messrs. Hill & Co. Connecting the three batteries was a "military" road and each battery was surrounded by a ditch about 20 feet deep. The South battery was equipped with two guns, while the other two had one gun each. All the guns were of 18 tons, and were fired OVER the parapets, and not through loop-holes, thus enabling them to be pointed in any direction. To support the Inchkeith batteries a similar one was constructed on Kinghorn Ness, with two 18-ton guns. Nothing of this battery now remains. The three Inchkeith batteries are listed buildings, but may soon be demolished. From around 1890 onwards, visitors to the island were not allowed to land without prior permission. During the first half of the 20th century, the island was heavily armed with powerful guns and searchlights and, along with the forts at Kinghorn and Leith, formed the principal part of the Forth

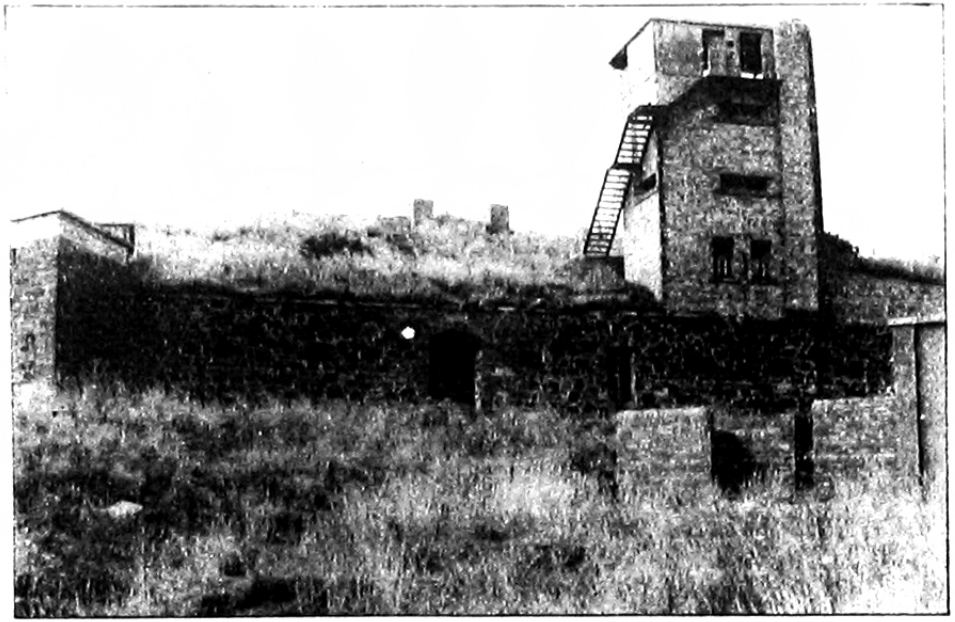


A view of Inchkeith lighthouse



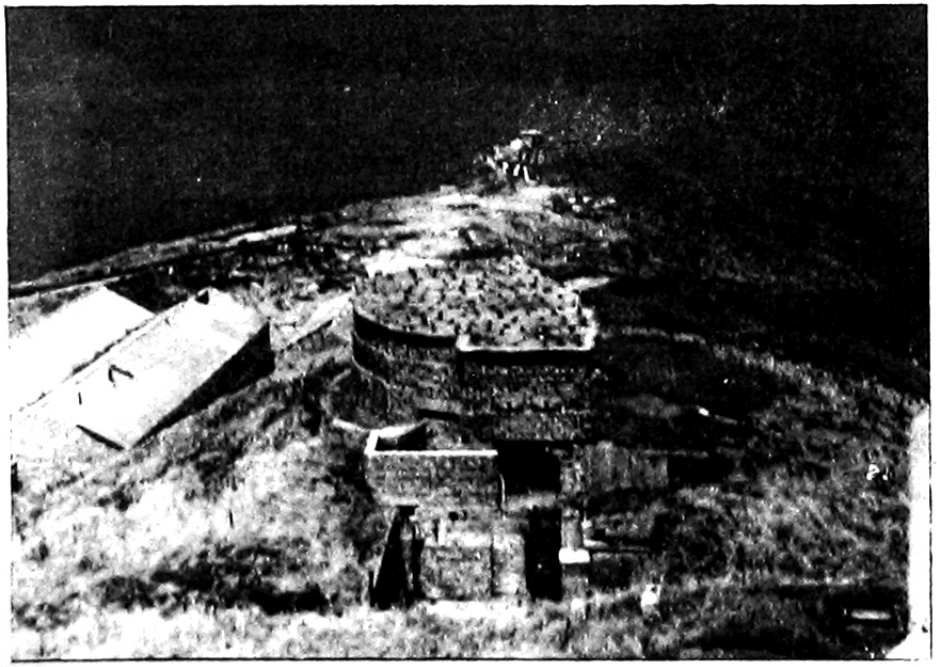
Close-up of the plaque above the entrance.

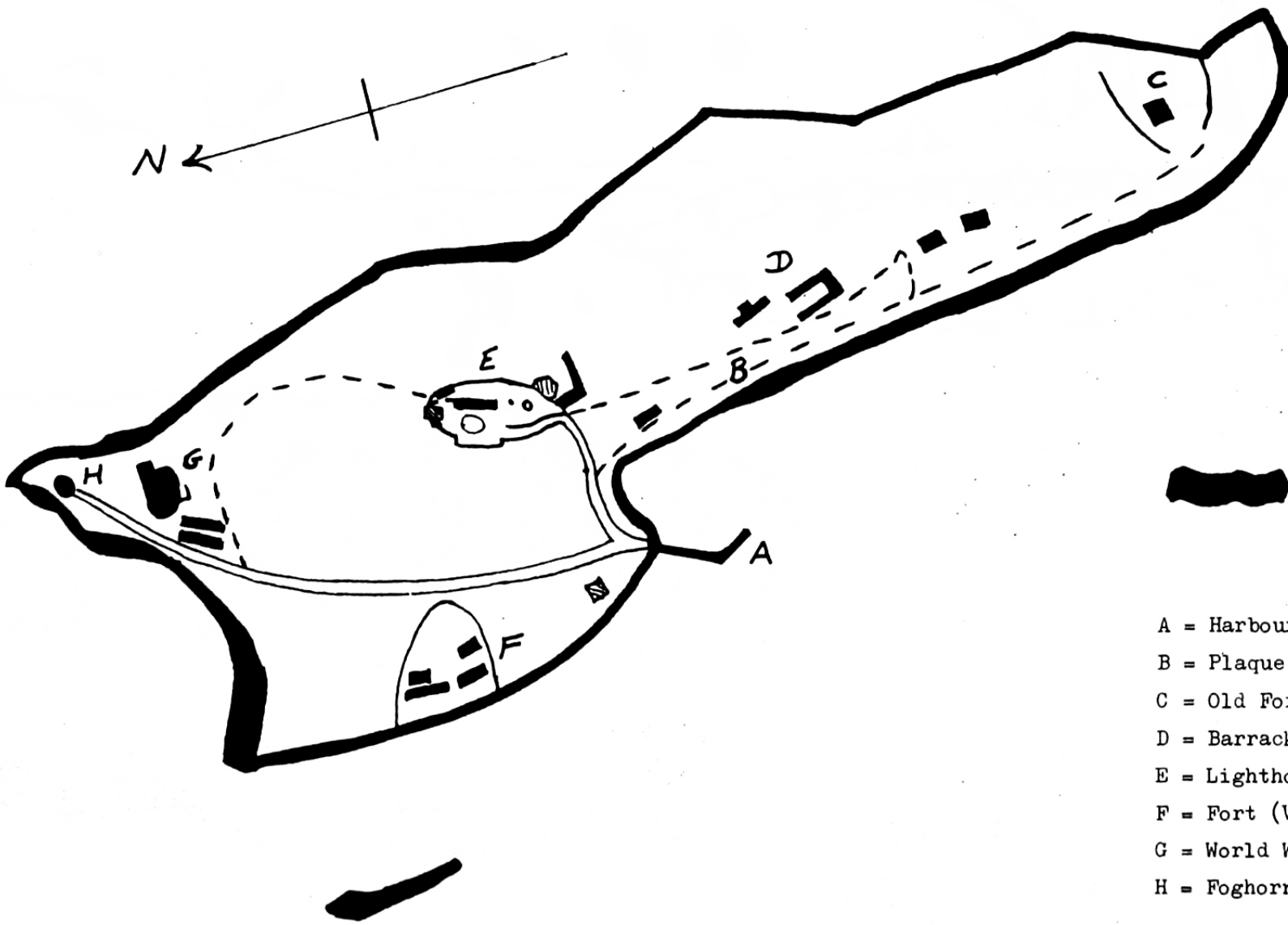
defences throughout both World Wars. Now that all the military equipment has been removed, however, the empty batteries, canteen and barracks stand derelict and in a state of decay. Part of the "military" road is yet visible because it is still used by the lighthouse keepers to reach the foghorn on the North-East headland, just beyond the old battery. But the rest of the island, with the exception of the lighthouse area itself, is neglected and overgrown, concealing many crevices and holes. Inchkeith was recently bought by Mr. Tom Farmer, who has plans to turn it into an adventure playground for children. Now many visitors simply come and go at will, often taking a Sunday afternoon trip out there if they have a boat. Many dead seabirds are to be seen lying along the waysides all over the island. They have been killed off by botulism, caused by eating all sorts of rubbish. This is a widespread phenomenon which usually occurs in late summer, and especially after a period of particularly warm weather, when the heat causes bacteria in the rubbish to multiply.



Remains of a 19th century fort. Above the main doorway in the centre of the picture is a lintel inscribed - V R 1880.

World War II battery on the North-East headland. The foghorn is on the point behind it.





A = Harbour
B = Plaque
C = Old Fort
D = Barracks
E = Lighthouse Area
F = Fort (VR 1880)
G = World War II battery
H = Foghorn

The Lighthouse

The first mention of Inchkeith with regard to a lighthouse seems to have occurred in 1635, when meetings were held to discuss the possibility of erecting a light on the Isle of May. One skipper said then that Inchkeith should also have one, as there were no lights at all farther up the Forth estuary. As it turned out, however, the Isle of May got its lighthouse the following year but Inchkeith had to wait another 170 years or so.

Despite having the May light to guide them through the entrance to the Forth, ships sailing up the estuary still had Inchkeith and some neighbouring skerries lying in their path. In fact, during stormy weather or at night, many skippers would make a run for a harbour farther up the east coast rather than try to



navigate the Forth. In 1801, the "Aberdeen" was wrecked off Kinghorn Ness. Ten of the thirteen crew and passengers were drowned and £10,000 worth of cargo was lost. This unfortunate incident may have helped precipitate the erection by the Northern Lighthouse Board of a lighthouse on Inchkeith because shortly afterwards Robert Stevenson, the grandfather of the famous author Robert Louis Stevenson, and other members of the NLB committee visited the island to find a suitable place for siting a lighthouse.

In 1803, the remains of the French fortress were cleared away and work was begun on the lighthouse. Immediately it was a pioneer in its field. Instead of the old mirror glass, the light was fitted with reflectors made of copper and plated with silver, and the whale oil and "common" lamp used up to now were, in the case of Inchkeith, replaced by spermaceti oil and the Argand burner, invented by a Frenchman, Aime Argand. Due to this technological advance, the Northern Lighthouse Board became known, by an Act of Parliament, as the Commissioners of the Northern Lighthouses. This was just the first instance where the Inchkeith lighthouse was a pioneer station.

The lighthouse building is constructed of ashlar with a metal-framed lantern and an internal wheel stairway. It contains living quarters, originally used by the families of a Principal and an Assistant Lightkeeper, but now empty. The roof is protected from the elements by a surrounding, castellated, parapet wall. The total height of the lighthouse is 50 feet. The cost of building was over £5,000, five times the amount spent on previous NLB lighthouses. Above the entrance is a plaque, which states:-

"FOR THE DIRECTION OF MARINERS, AND FOR THE BENEFIT OF COMMERCE, THIS LIGHTHOUSE WAS ERECTED BY ORDER OF THE COMMISSIONERS OF THE NORTHERN LIGHTHOUSES. IT WAS FOUNDED ON THE 18TH DAY OF MAY IN THE YEAR 1803, AND LIGHTED ON THE 14TH OF SEPTEMBER 1804. THOMAS SMITH, ENGINEER."

The wall surrounding the lighthouse area is of white-washed rubble, incorporating a small section of the French fortress containing a loop-hole for a cannon.

In around 1816, ships passing the Isle of May and Inchkeith had to pay a duty of ½d per ton, in addition to the flat rate for all Scottish lighthouses (1½d-2d per ton). In 1815, the fixed light was changed to a revolving one in order that it might be distinguished from the Isle of May light.

In 1817, Thomas Carlyle and Edward Irving (Headmaster at Kirkcaldy Burgh School) visited Inchkeith and Carlyle describes the lighthouse in his "Reminiscences". The revolving light was not a single lamp turning on an axis, but about twelve lamps set in a large glass cylinder. Each lamp had its own mirror and it was only the cylinder that revolved. He also gives a description of the lighthouse keeper, saying that he was the "most life-weary mortal" he had ever seen. He kept seven cows on the island and had a wife and family, who served the visitors with biscuits and fresh milk.

Some time later, the Highland Club of Scotland, founded in 1825 to preserve the games and sports of the Scottish Highlands, for some reason or other held their annual fetes on Inchkeith for a few years running.

Introduction of the Dioptric System

From experiments conducted on Gullane Hill in February 1833, it was found that the light from a single lens equalled that given out by seven or nine reflectors. The Lord Provost of Edinburgh, John Learmonth of Dean, hastily summoned a special meeting of the lighthouse committee to discuss proposals for converting Inchkeith's revolving light to the new lens, or dioptric system.

Robert Stevenson was against the new system on the grounds of economy and discussions dragged on and on. Sir David

Brewster, a member of that committee, became so tired of the "humming" and "hawing" that he wrote an anonymous and scathing article in the "Edinburgh Review" about the ineptitude of lighthouse committees. Then he wrote to Joseph Hume in Parliament on the matter. This man, a radical who revelled in the field of abuse and mismanagement, set up a Government inquiry into the affair and questioned the committee members repeatedly. When confronted, Stevenson still maintained that, although he had been ordered by the committee to convert the Inchkeith light to the dioptric system, it was still his opinion that the old reflectors and Argand burner method was by far the most economical system.

The committee's next act was to send Robert Stevenson's son, Alan, to the Continent to study the dioptric system there. After much experimentation, fieldwork and travel he returned to pronounce it a worthwhile scheme because it produced a far better light for the same amount of oil burned; that the light was stronger and could be shone equally in all directions. The greatest drawback was that, if the single lamp failed, the consequences could be much more serious than if one of several burners went out. But the Commissioners had already decided to convert the Inchkeith light and the first dioptric light in Britain was installed there and shone for the first time on October 1st, 1835. The reflector light was soon afterwards discontinued. Robert Stevenson was, however, partly right, and his son was partly wrong, for the new system did use twice as much oil, although the greater brilliancy of the light made up for it. Close on the heels of Inchkeith, the Isle of May lighthouse became the first British dioptric fixed light, which shone for the first time on September 22nd, 1836. The old Inchkeith equipment was sent to the new lighthouse at Cape Spear, near St. John, Newfoundland, and the apparatus from the May went to Harbour Grace.

As lens lights began to be installed in other Scottish lighthouses, trainee lightkeepers had to do six weeks

on the Bell Rock (which did not become dioptric until 1902) and six weeks on either Inchkeith or the Isle of May, in order to see both systems at work. The Girdle Ness light, farther up the east coast mainland, was converted in 1847 and the old lantern was transferred to Inchkeith for use in experiments, where it still remains today.

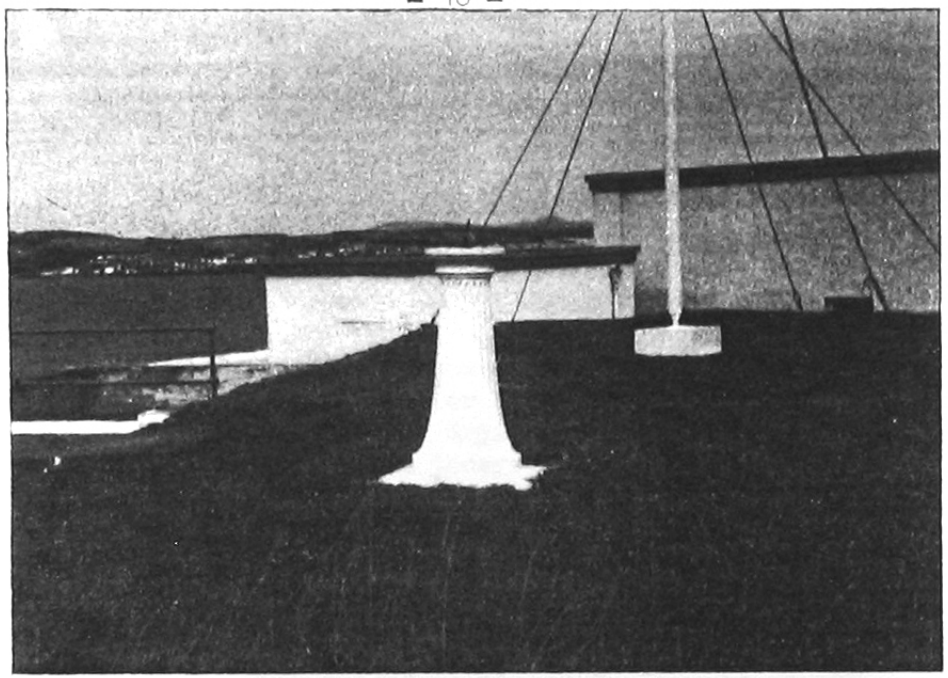
Near the end of the nineteenth century, in 1889 to be exact, new machinery was installed in the Inchkeith light, enabling it to send out a beam of light every thirty seconds. This new holophotal dioptric light was set up in a glass turret ten feet high and six feet in diameter. This mechanism is still in use today and there is a small plaque attached to it, which says:-

"DESIGNED BY D.A. STEVENSON, ENGINEER. JAMES DOVE & CO. EDINBURGH 1889. FIRST ORDER DIOPTRIC HOLOPHOTAL LIGHT. 1 REVOLUTION EVERY 4 MINUTES."

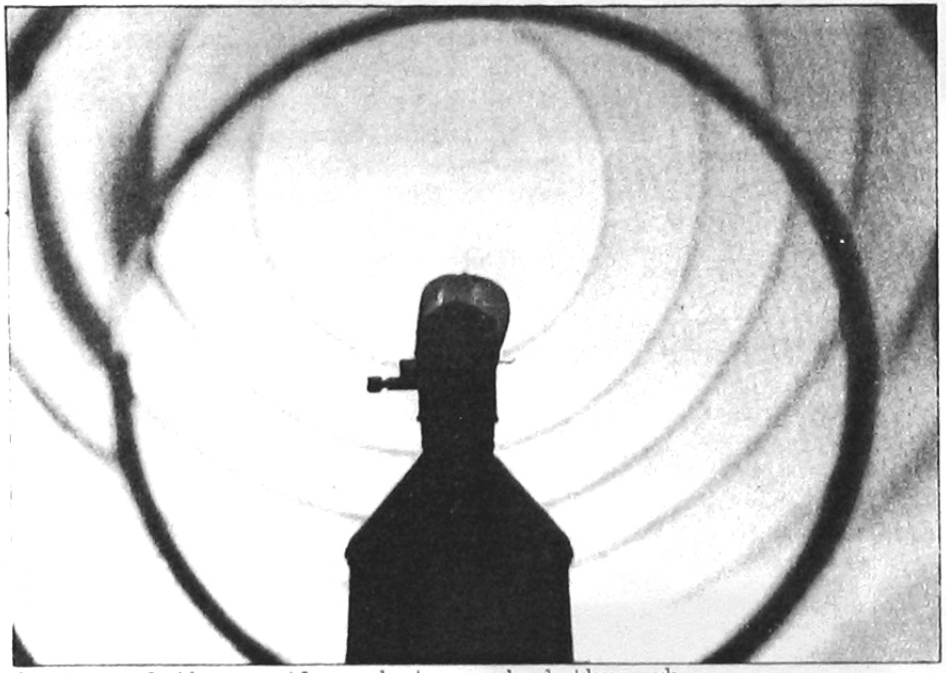
The original dioptric lantern, which had done 54 years service, was taken to the Royal Scottish Musuem, Edinburgh.

Boats bringing supplies attended Inchkeith from the early years of the lighthouse, visiting it four times a month and twice on Sundays, so that the lightkeepers could go to church. The boatmen were usually fishermen or otherwise unoccupied lightkeepers, and crews. In 1890, Donald McDonald, boatman for Inchkeith, was drowned while making what was to be his last trip before retiring. Two years before, in 1888, the German ship "Paul" was wrecked on the island and the two lightkeepers, Robert Grierson and Laurence Anderson, were each presented with field glasses from the German Government for their services in rescuing the crew.

The incandescent oil burner or mantle, introduced in France in 1898, was installed in the Inchkeith lighthouses in 1904, and thereafter the Commissioners decided to alter all their large, oil-burning lights. During the 1920s, Inchkeith was one of the stations where the Government carried out experiments for a wireless signal.



Sundial and base of flagpole behind the lighthouse living quarters.



A view of the mantle, photographed through

Today ships can tune their wireless wave lengths with the callibration station on the island, which has its own signal and goes on the air twice a day. The thirty second beam still operates in the lighthouse and a check can be kept on its timing by means of a metal rod attached to a cog wheel. If the speed at which it ticks over alters, the lightkeeper on watch knows at once that the machinery is not keeping perfect timing. As the starting handle for the motor revolves, a heavy weight falls slowly from the top of the lighthouse to the ground forty feet below, taking ninety minutes to do so. The light is ignited with paraffin oil, forced up a central column under air pressure. Before it reaches the mantle it is vapourised and the 55mm lamp gives off a light equal to 167,000 candlepower, which in good visibility is visible at a distance of 21 miles. The lens is made up of eight sections and, as the light lines up with each section, it sends out a beam. The light is able to be sent out horizontally with the aid of prisms, set close together but not connected. During periods of strong sunshine the prisms and mantle have to be protected by blinds as the sun glinting through the glass onto them could easily start a fire. A spare mantle is kept nearby at all times in case the one currently on the lamp burns out during the night.

The Foghorn

When it was originally installed in 1899, the Inchkeith foghorn sounded practically non-stop for 130 hours. The people living on the Fife Coast complained so vehemently to the Commissioners that the latter had to instruct the lightkeepers to point it away from the shore whenever they could. Today it sounds its two warning notes lasting $3\frac{1}{2}$ seconds, every 90 seconds, only when there is fog.

It takes three diesel engines to obtain the air pressure necessary to operate the siren. As this air is pumped into the siren chamber it is broken up by a fluted inner section, causing the resulting blast.

The Daily Life of the Keepers

Today there are three lightkeepers on Inchkeith, a Principal and two Assistants. Families of lightkeepers no longer live on the island but are housed in Edinburgh. They can, however, visit quite often, coming out on the supply boat or pilot boat. The men are kept busy practically 24 hours a day. In the morning and afternoon there are cleaning and maintenance jobs to be done, and a watch for fog at the same time. At night there are shifts for keeping a watch on the light which, nowadays, is made a bit easier by means of a mirror strategically placed in the drying green at the rear of the living quarters, which today are in a separate building from the lighthouse. This enables the keeper on watch to sit comfortably by the fire and at the same time keep an eye on the light - simply by glancing out of the window.

It was interesting to compare our visit on the 28th August 1983 with that of Carlyle and Irving almost 170 years ago. Far from being "Life-weary mortals", the men - Principal David Leslie and his two Assistants, Mr. Jamieson and Mr. Charleton - were full of energy and had a great sense of humour. In fact, as the Principal pointed out, a sense of humour is essential for this job and a man without it would not last long on the island. They were also very philosophical in their ideas and outlook, and, whereas Carlyle and his friend received biscuits and fresh milk, we can boast one better - biscuits and coffee!

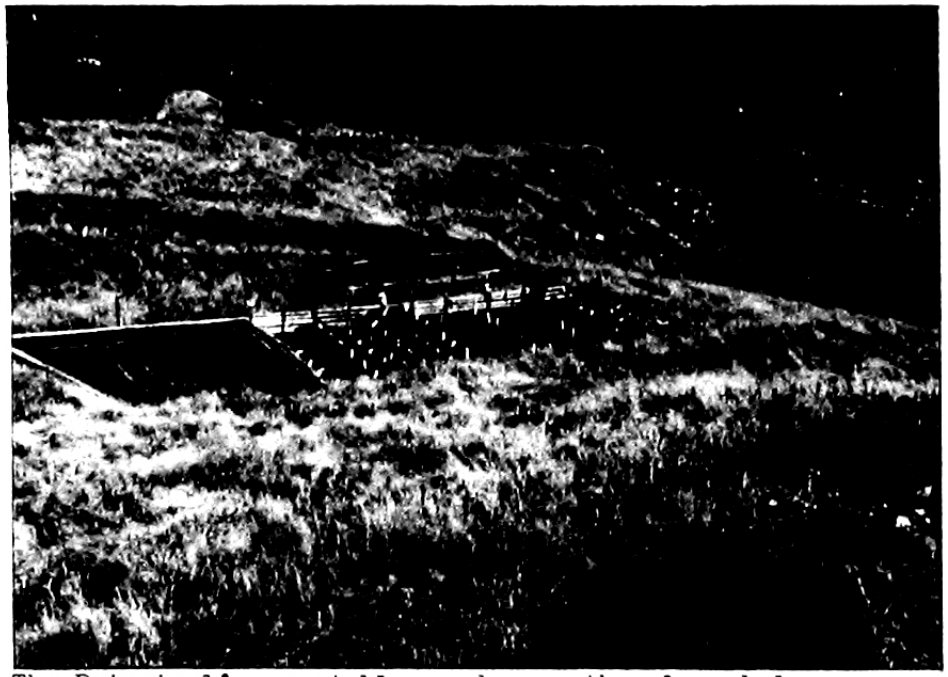
Everything is due, no doubt, to the better communications between the island and the shore. Boats and casual visitors are more frequent, there is a helicopter landing pad in the lighthouse courtyard and there is also a direct telephone line to the island.

There are no horses on the island today and the lightkeepers do not keep cows, although Mr. Leslie has

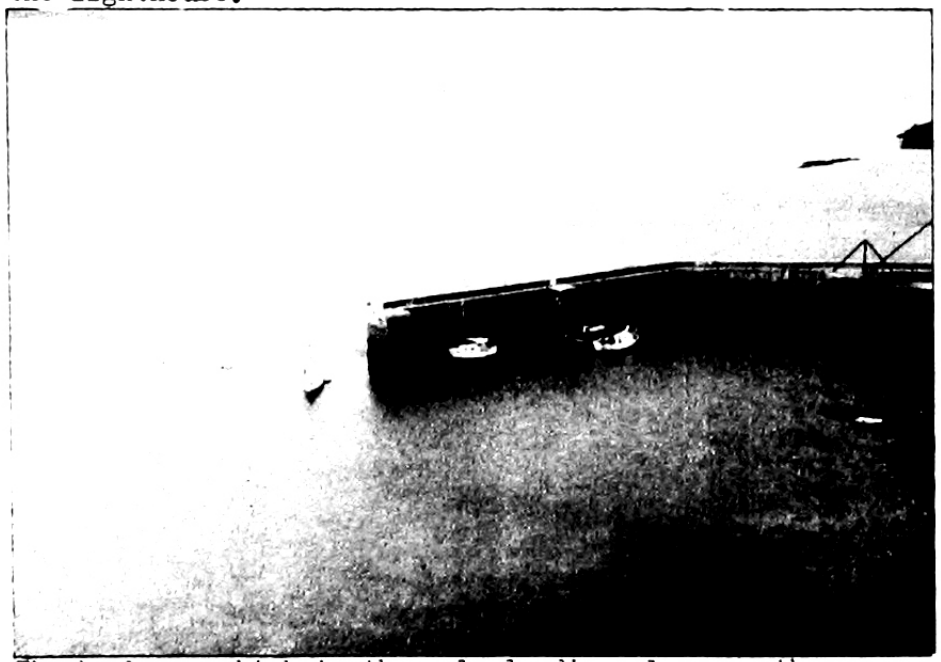
successfully cultivated a vegetable garden on the slopes below the lighthouse. Their mode of transport is a tractor and trailer, which rumbles up and down the road between the lighthouse and the harbour.

The surrounding remains of houses and fortifications do not owe their dilapidated state totally to the effects of time and wear, however. We were surprised to learn that vandals actually come out in boats and smash windows, spray-paint walls, etc. - an unfortunate side-effect of the improved means of communication that the island enjoys.

The old block-houses and batteries will probably be demolished sometime in the future when development of an adventure playground gets under way and, while Inchkeith is one of only seven remaining paraffin-operated lights in the Northern Lighthouse Service, it is earmarked for convertion to automation. When that day comes, the island will hopefully be in use as an adventure playground or serving some other purpose, otherwise it will be left to the birds, the wind and the vandals.



The Principal's vegetable garden on the slope below the lighthouse.



The harbour, which is the only landing place on the island.

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