

OBSERVATIONS UPON A MODEL IN SILVER OF THE
FIRST LIGHTHOUSE ERECTED ON THE EDDYSTONE
ROCKS.

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Everybody has perhaps heard of the Eddystone Rocks near Plymouth, and the celebrated Lighthouse, erected by the great engineer, Mr. Smeaton, which now stands thereon. This is, however, not the first building, for two have preceded it—one destroyed by water in 1703, of which this is the model; one built of timber by Mr. Rudyard in 1706, and burnt in 1755; and one built by Mr. Smeaton, partly of timber in 1759; of this the wood-work was burnt in 1770, but renewed by him with stone and metal in 1774, since which time it has remained uninjured. But it is feared that this may have to be removed and a new one constructed, not from any failure or fault in the fine structure, which was almost one of the wonders of the world when it was built; but, from certain vibrations which are felt during storms, it is feared that the rock itself on which it stands is giving way, being hollowed and undermined by the force and action of the waves.

Mr. Smeaton in his great folio work on the Eddystone Lighthouse, published in 1813, gives not only an account of his own great work and proceedings in the construction of his lighthouse, illustrated with all plans, drawings, and elevations of it, but also the previous history of the rock and the lighthouses which had been built upon it, accompanied with engravings copied from such early prints as he was able to obtain, and it is from one of them that I am enabled to identify this curious model with the first of these lighthouses, and to his work I am indebted for the following particulars in illustration of its history.

The numerous fatal accidents which frequently happened

to homeward bound ships by running on the Eddystone Rocks made it very desirable that a lighthouse should be built there, but the difficulties attending such an undertaking appeared insuperable. However, in the year 1696, Mr. Henry Winstanley of Littlebury in Essex, Gent., was not only hardy enough, but obtained the necessary powers, probably from the Corporation of the Trinity House, to put in execution a scheme for the erection of a lighthouse on these rocks.

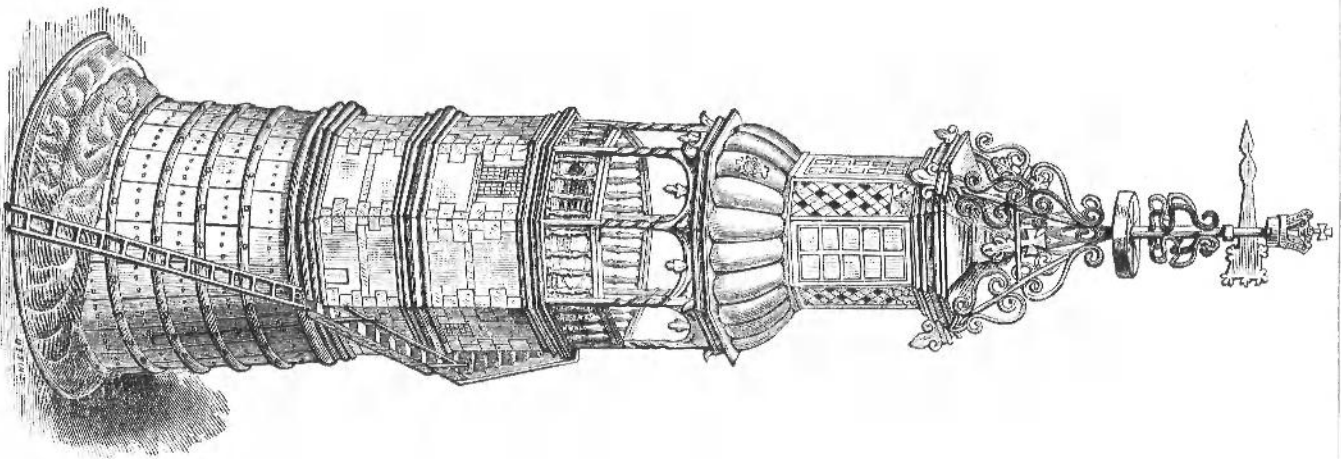
Mr. Winstanley had distinguished himself in a certain branch of mechanics, the tendency of which was to raise wonders and surprise. He was very ingenious, and had at his house at Littlebury many curious contrivances. He was a man of some property, but whether he was a proprietor or shareholder of the undertaking under the Trinity House, or only the directing engineer, does not appear. He established a place of public exhibition at Hyde Park Corner, called "the Winstanley Waterworks," which were shewn at certain periods at one shilling a head, and the exhibition continued after the death of Mr. Winstanley, and still existed in 1709. These particulars are of no importance, but serve to give a sketch of the talents of the man, and may account for the fantastic kind of structure he erected on the Eddystone Rock for the purpose of a lighthouse.

He has given the following narrative of its construction, the progress of which may all be traced in the model :—
"The lighthouse was begun in 1696, and was more than four years in building, not from the greatness of the work, but from the difficulty and danger of getting backwards and forwards to the place, as nothing could be left there safe for the first two years but what was most thoroughly affixed to the rock.

"The first summer was spent in making twelve holes in the rock, and fastening twelve great irons to hold the work that was to be done afterwards. The next summer was spent in making a solid body or round pillar, twelve feet high and fourteen feet in diameter; then we had more time to work at the place, and something to hold by. The third year the aforesaid pillar or work was raised, which to the vane was eighty feet. Being all finished with the lantern, and all the rooms which were

in it, we ventured to lodge there soon after Midsummer, for the greater despatch of the work. But the first night the weather came bad, and so continued that it was eleven days before any boat could come near us again, and not being acquainted with the height of the sea's rising, we were almost all the time drowned with wet, and our provisions in as bad a condition, though we worked night and day as much as possible, to make shelter for ourselves. In the storm we lost some of our materials, although we did what we could to save them; but the boat returning, we all left the house to be refreshed on shore, and as soon as the weather permitted we returned again and finished all, and put up the light on the 14th November, 1698, which being so late in the year, it was three days before Christmas before we had relief to come on shore again, and were almost at the last extremity for want of provisions. But, by the providence of God, there came two boats with provisions and the family that was to take care of the lights; and so ended this year's work."

This model represents the lighthouse as it then existed. Mr. Winstanley has not himself left any particular representation of the building here described as the production of three years' work. An elevation of it, however, is given in Mr. Smeaton's great work, made from a perspective print said to have been copied from a drawing taken on the rock by one Jaaziell Johnston, painter. This print was extremely rare, no other copy being known to Mr. Smeaton, and, as the lantern was lighted, the structure must have been fully complete. It may be well to mention here that the lanterns of lighthouses were at this time lighted with tallow candles, five of which weighed two pounds. The parts of this structure, as represented in the engraving, are the sloping surface of the rock, the stone basement, the store-room, the hall or living room, the "kitchen" or cupola, and the lantern for the lights. The silver model corresponds with the engraving in every minute detail, even to the design and ornament of the iron scroll work above the lantern, and a small oval window in the cupola. It was therefore probably made after the drawing by J. Johnston the painter, and the date



Model in Silver of the first Edystone Lighthouse.

of it must be at the latest 1699, as the lighthouse did not long continue in that exact form, as will appear, and it is hardly likely that the model would be made of the first original structure after great alterations had been made in its size and details of form. The narrative continues—"The fourth year, finding in the winter (1698-9) the effects the sea had upon the house, burying the lantern at times, although more than sixty feet high, early in the spring I encompassed the aforesaid building with a new work, four feet in thickness from the foundation, making all solid near twenty feet high, and taking down the upper part of the first building, made it as it now appears. And yet the sea in time of storms flies in appearance one hundred feet above the vane, and at times doth cover half the side of the house and the lantern as if it were under water." Mr. Smeaton in his great work gives an engraving of the lighthouse as altered, in which many changes appear. This second lighthouse, thus altered, lasted but a few years, and during the progress of the alterations, it being intimated to Mr. Winstanley that one day the lighthouse would certainly be overset, he replied that he was so well assured of the stability of his building he should only wish to be there in the greatest storm that ever blew under the face of Heaven, that he might see the effect it would have on his structure.

In this wish he was too amply gratified, for whilst he was there with his workmen and light keepers the dreadful storm began, which raged most violently in the night upon the 26th November, 1703, being one of the most severe and devastating storms ever recorded in Great Britain. The next morning, when the storm had so much abated that it could be seen whether the lighthouse had suffered by it, nothing appeared standing, but upon a more careful inspection, there only appeared some of the larger irons whereby the work was fixed on the rock; nor were any of the people or the materials of the building ever found afterwards.

The silver model is made to serve as a table ornament, being a standard or table saltcellar and spice box. It stands 17 inches high and weighs 19 oz. troy. On the top is the lantern, above which is a rod, supported by scroll work, which carries a vane, and terminates in a

royal crown. Beneath the lantern is a dome or cupola resting on an open arcade with a gallery, within which is a depression for salt, the windows of the lantern being perforated to serve as a caster for powdered sugar. Below this gallery are three stories, each being a box: one, the "state room," empty; the next, the "store room," has a lid perforated for pepper; the lowest forms a larger box, also empty. There is a winding external staircase leading from the basement storey of masonry to the upper storey and gallery, and a little silver ladder hangs to the foot of the staircase, to reach down to the rock on which the lighthouse is based, or the sea. It was formerly among the Morgan family plate at Tredegar, but how or when it came into the possession of the family there is neither record nor tradition, and it was given away about 1820 by my father, and is now in the possession of Miss Rous of Courtyrala in Glamorganshire, who has inherited it, and has kindly lent it to me for exhibition here. Of its earlier history nothing is known, but the Goldsmith's hall marks are very curious, and give us some information. It bears no London marks. The only marks which it bears are three oblong stamps, on one of which is the name *Rowe*, a very common Plymouth name, on another the word *Plin^o*, and on the third the word *Britan*.

It will be remembered that the Eddystone is in the vicinity of Plymouth, and the inference which I draw from these marks is that it was made at Plymouth, as indicated by the word *Plin^o*, by a silversmith of the name of Rowe, and that the word *Britan* denotes it to be of the *Britannia standard* of silver, as it must have been made in the year 1698 when the lighthouse was completed and in existence.

These unusual marks are thus to be explained. The standard of silver plate was raised by Act of Parliament in 1697 in order to prevent the current coin of the realm being melted down to make silver plate, as was then the practice, and special marks were ordered to denote this high standard. Among these was a figure of Britannia, and that standard went by the name of the *Britannia standard*, as it does now. In that Act of Parliament, however, the provincial halls were not mentioned, and it

therefore only applied to London. These halls had consequently no appointed mark to designate that standard of silver, yet no silversmith could lawfully make plate of any other standard. As this piece of plate made by Rowe of Plymouth was not made and marked in London, it must have been assayed and marked at Exeter, and the inference is that the Exeter hall adopted the word *Britan*, an abbreviation of Britannia, as a mark to denote that quality of silver. This piece of plate is thus not only of considerable historical interest as the model of a very remarkable structure which had but a very brief existence, and ultimately perished by a miserable catastrophe, but is also curious as being the only accurate model in silver of any structure that I am acquainted with, and is of great rarity as a most interesting specimen of provincial silversmiths' work one hundred and eighty years ago.