

Hornby Lighthouse

*“Gloomy cliffs so worn and wasted, with the washing of the waves,
Are ye not like giant tombstones round those lovely ocean graves?
Are ye not the sad memorials telling of a mighty grief,
Dark with records ground and lettered into covered rock and reef?”*
.....From “Dunbar, 1857” written by Henry Kendall (1830-1882)

Ever since people first ventured to sea, the risk of shipwreck was ever present, and the waters guarding the entrance of Sydney Harbour were no exception, as this excerpt from Kendall’s poem suggests. Sydney’s towering sandstone cliffs, jagged reefs and onshore gales have conspired through history to bring many vessels to their doom.

Most notable among the shipping disasters along this section of coast was the loss of the *Dunbar*, a 1167 ton sailing vessel, in 1857. Upon hitting the cliffs just south of the harbour’s entrance, the *Dunbar* began to break up almost immediately. There was but one survivor, James Johnson, who found himself hurled onto the cliffs where he managed to gain a hold. In all, 121 passengers and crew perished that night. The high death toll shocked and staggered the population of Sydney, and some 20,000 people lined George Street for the funeral procession a few days later.

With such a disaster, and the loss of a further 22 lives in the wreck of the *Catherine Adamson* just nine weeks later, the authorities were forced to heed calls for a lighthouse to be established to aid the safe passage of ships through the Heads of Sydney Harbour.

The Hornby Lighthouse, built in 1858, was the result. It is located on South Head, thereby marking the actual entrance to Sydney Harbour. Known as the Lower Light, South Head, to distinguish it from the nearby Macquarie Light, the structure was named after Captain (later Admiral Sir) Phipps Hornby. The tower was designed by Alexander Dawson and illuminated in 1859 with kerosene, converted to incandescent gas, and then in 1933 to electricity.

Even in the modern era of satellite navigation, onboard computers and other electronic marvels, Hornby Lighthouse, in its bright red and white livery, serves as a practical navigation aid and a reminder of our long maritime history, and its stories of peril, disaster and heroism.

Organisers of Sydney Harbour Week selected Hornby Lighthouse as the icon for its inaugural Harbour Awards this year. Hornby Lighthouse stands as a silent sentinel by the waters edge at South Head, guarding our magnificent harbour and helping to guide mariners to its sheltered waters.

The ‘Hornbies’ are handcrafted by Australian Heritage Fleet volunteers from recycled Tasmanian pine once used as the deck timbers of the *James Craig*.

