

St Catherine's Lighthouse

The first lighthouse at the south of the Isle of Wight was established on St Catherine's Down in 1323 as part of St Catherine's Oratory. It was built by order of the Pope.

Known locally as the Pepperpot, its octagonal stone tower still stands on the hill to the west of Niton.

It is Britain's only surviving medieval lighthouse, and the second oldest (only the Roman lighthouse at Dover being older).



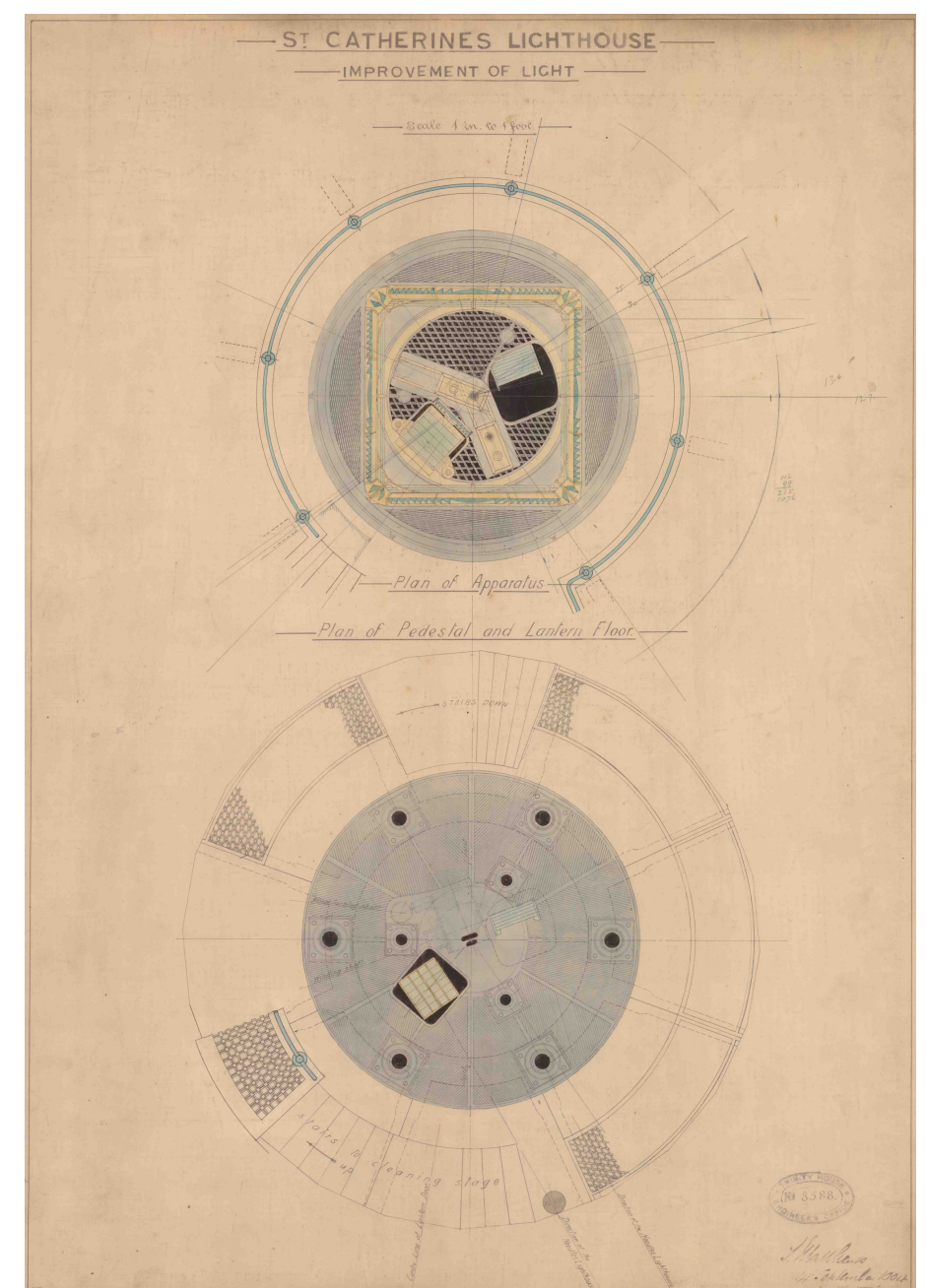
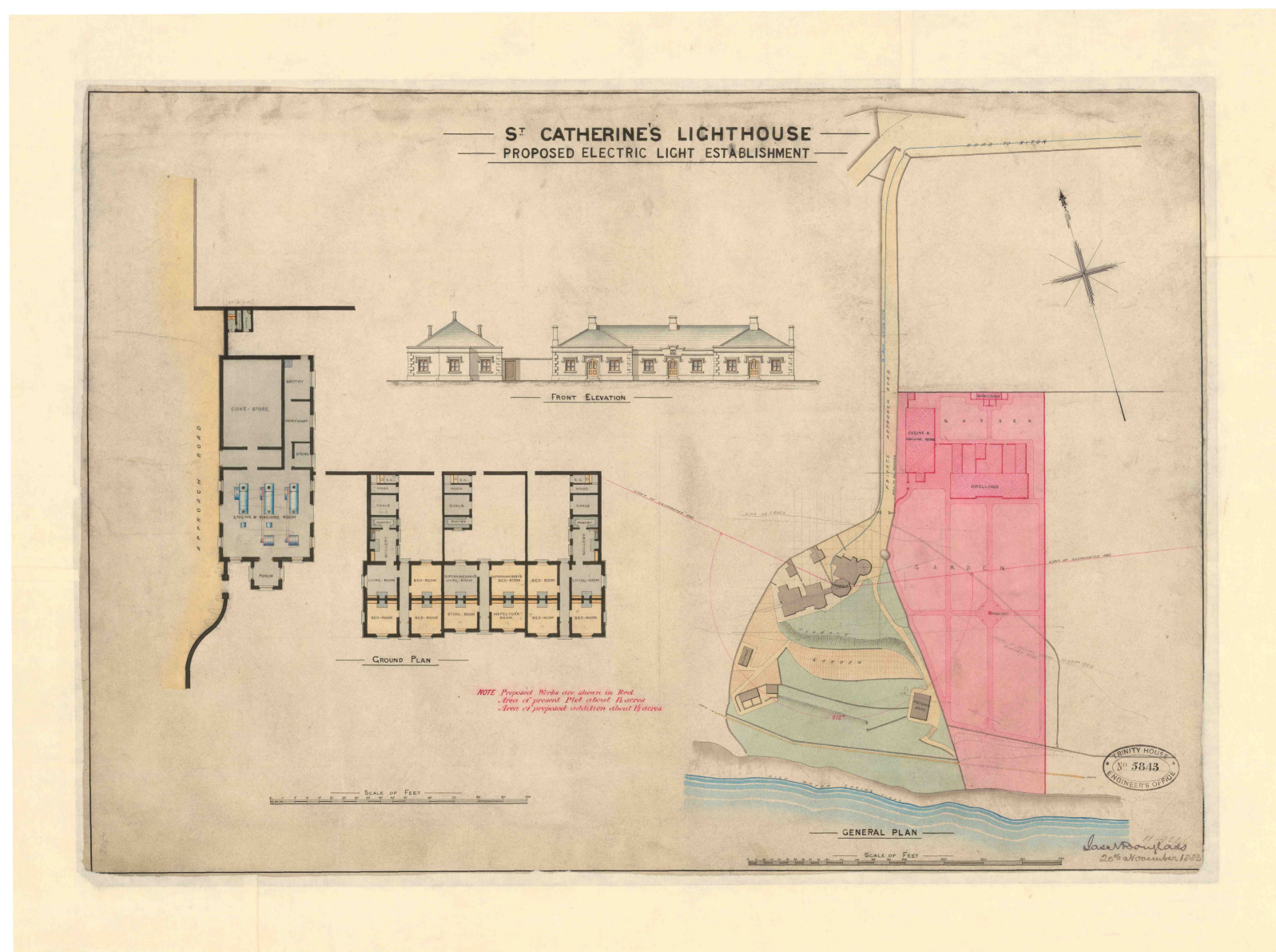
St Catherines Oratory

The current lighthouse was built by Trinity House in 1838 on land below the village of Niton at the southern tip of the Isle of Wight.

Initially the light was provided by an oil lamp, enhanced by the first Fresnel lens, a dioptric lens which used a series of prisms to refract the light to produce a stronger beam. The light was often obscured by fog, so in 1875 the height of the tower was reduced by 13m.

The first fog signal was installed in 1868.

St Catherine's was converted to electricity for the first time in 1888, using steam engines to provide power. At the same time more cottages were built to provide housing for the additional staff required to man the new engines. An arc lamp (using electricity to create an 'arc' between two carbon rods - the vapour released creates a bright light), and a new lens were installed during this period of upgrades to increase the power of the light and a new fog signal was also installed.



Plans of some of the changes to St Catherines (Copyright Trinity House)

In 1904 the Fresnel lens on display at The Classic Boat Museum was installed and in 1920 the lighthouse was connected to mains power for the first time. A new lamp was installed with an automatic bulb changer. This system was still in place until 2021 when the all the equipment and lens were removed and replaced with an LED array.