

The Bell Rock Lighthouse – 200 years old today

☒ On 1 February 1811, The Bell Rock Lighthouse lanterns were lit for the first time. It had taken Robert Stevenson and his men four years to complete what became Scotland's most famous lighthouse.

The small display at [The National Library](#) until the end of February 2011 chronicles the epic construction story, as part of a nationwide programme of events celebrating a great engineering achievement. On show are letters, drawings, ledgers and plans from the business archive of Robert Stevenson and Sons.

They are also screening a film of the Northern Lighthouse Board's annual inspection of lighthouses from the 1960s.

This is part of the Bell Rock celebrations led by The National Library of Scotland which is showcasing a variety of treasures to chart its past.

The Bell Rock Lighthouse display comprises a collection of artefacts which give a fascinating insight into the construction of the world's oldest surviving sea-washed lighthouse.

The display marks 200 years since the first lighting of the Bell Rock Lighthouse which took place on 1 February 1811. Constructed by Scottish engineer Robert Stevenson, it stands guard over some of the fiercest waters of the North Sea and is still saving lives today, flashing once every five seconds to warn ships away from the rocks.

Highlights of the display include:

- The drawing of the Beacon House, the first building

on the rock, which was created to house the workmen and the blacksmith's forge;

- Stevenson's ideas for the creation of the lighthouse, and original designs;

- Documentation outlining the dangers that the Bell Rock posed;

- Sir Walter Scott's experience of his visit to the lighthouse during an inspection tour;

- A film of an inspection of the lighthouse.

It took Stevenson almost five years to complete the building on the Bell Rock, also known as Inchcape, which is located 12 miles off the coast of Angus. During construction, he and his team faced huge waves, atrocious storms and attacks by navy gangs. While the lighting apparatus of the lighthouse has been replaced several times and the living quarters and light room have been modernised, the high-quality masonry work on which the lighthouse rests has not been replaced or adapted since it was built.

Sheila Mackenzie, Senior Manuscripts Curator at the National Library of Scotland, said: "We are delighted to join in the Bell Rock Lighthouse bicentenary celebrations by producing the Building the Bell Rock Lighthouse display. This incredible feat of engineering is reflected by the diverse range of items on show, from letters and drawings to videos.

"Anyone interested in Scottish history should pay us a visit to experience an illuminating glimpse into the lifespan of Scotland's most famous lighthouse."

The display will be on show at the National Library of Scotland's public exhibition space on George IV Bridge, Edinburgh, until 28 February.

You can get [more information on the celebrations taking place](#)

[throughout the country](#) to mark the anniversary.

