

Our way to start a lighthouse museum

In the middle of the 1970's a lighthouse historian from the Argentina Territorial Waters Authority contacted Copenhagen to hear, if it would be possible to visit the old Eastern Lighthouse on Nakkehoved. The Danish Territorial Water Authority searched through their files and found that an old lighthouse did exist, which was no longer in use, but with an interior which would be exactly the same as it was in the 19th century.

The lighthouse had not functioned since 1898. The same year that the west Lighthouse – which was one of two original coal-fired lighthouses on Nakkehoved dating from 1772 – had been heightened and a rotating lens installed whilst the East Lighthouse was taken out of service and forgotten.

The interest shown in the East Lighthouse by the Argentinian historian caused Græsted-Gilleleje Municipality which now owned the East lighthouse along with the lighthouse Keeper's residence, to recognise that it had a unique lighthouse phenomenon preserved on Nakkehoved.

The Municipality was prepared to restore the lighthouse, and wisely gave the task to the Danish School of Architects and skilled local workers carried out the huge restoration project. A really magnificent job. When the work was almost completed contact was made with Gilleleje Museum, which agreed to arrange a small exhibition, and also took care of the daily running of this new lighthouse Museum. We were very proud, when in 1984, the new protected Nakkehoved East Lighthouse opened.

This obviously encouraged us to do something about the West Lighthouse. This lighthouse was still in use, and the former lighthouse Keeper Kai Langholz lived in the Keepers residence attached to the tower.

In 2002 Kai Langholz contacted the head of Gilleleje Museum Søren Frandsen, informing him that he was considering retiring on reaching 60 years of age. So, if we wanted Nakkehoved West Lighthouse as a museum, we had better do something about it.

At this time when the Territorial Water Authority had closed a number of lighthouses and then sold them for private residences or to nongovernmental organisations. Interest grew in creating a historic lighthouse museum in one of the existing lighthouses. Nakkehoved West lighthouse was a logical candidate.

At the time the Ministry of Culture in co-operation with the T.W.A. was in the process of studying Danish lighthouses. Seen in isolation the Nakkehoved West Lighthouse was not especially suited for preservation, but, as the East lighthouse was already protected, and, as the two lighthouses together told a unique story, it was decided to issue a protection order for the West lighthouse. We were fortunate in this, because Nakkehoved is the only place in Denmark where one can exhibit the past and the present. The East lighthouse is an example of a covered coal lighthouse and the West lighthouse as a later development as a rotating lens lighthouse from 1898.

But, how was the plan to establish a museum in Nakkehoved West lighthouse to be implemented? Gilleleje Museum was not in the position to buy or rent the buildings; so therefore began negotiations with the T.W.A. and the Municipality. The result was that the T.W.A. agreed to repair and restore the buildings and tower completely, and then transfer the right of use to Græste-Gilleleje Municipality (today Gribskov Municipality) on the condition that the municipality maintains the

building and tower, stipulated in a 10 years contract. Gribskov Municipality, which has always claimed to be a very cultural institution – as its 7 museums and its museum ship proves – entered into an agreement in 2005 with Gilleleje Museum about establishing an exhibition, and regarding the day-to-day management. This is a very advantageous agreement for the Museum, which is contracted to only pay salaries. Light and heating cost, internal and external maintenance is the responsibility of the municipality.

The exhibition, which covers about 130 square meter, shows the history of Danish lighthouses, and includes a model of the first Danish signal or optic lighthouse, established on Christians Ø in 1805; it also shows the various lighting systems with technical texts.

Upstairs in the lighthouse Keeper's residence, his old office is shown with original furniture, and there is a list of names of all the lighthouse keepers who served at Nakkehoved.

A royal Room' exhibiting correspondence between our King Frederik 7th and miss Louise Rasmussen – a scandalous relationship in Denmark's history. The King eventually married her – unheard of at the time – and gave her the title Countess Danner. King Christian 9th arranged to use the lighthouse for birthday celebrations of his Queen Louise – proved by the King's initials scratched on a window pane. King Christian 9th was known as the father-in-law of Europe.

In the same room there is also a rather full description of the life of Christian Faber – the lighthouse keeper 1824 – 1845, who is rather well-known in Denmark. Not only did he stop the sand drift along the coast of Northern Zealand, but he also managed to lay out a park around the lighthouses. The park contained flowers, a small wood, a dam and a vegetable garden. He also put in small pavilions where one could sit and enjoy the park. In this way Nakkehoved became a centre for culture, and a somewhat snobbish meeting place.

On the same floor there is a model of the optical telegraph. There is also a frieze showing the coastline between Nakkehoved and Kronborg Castle at Elsinore with the names of the substations of the telegraph system, at the time of the attack by the English on Copenhagen in 1801.

The small landings of the tower contain lists and pictures of national and international well-known personalities who have influenced the development of lighthouses. There are also pieces of old equipment from Danish lighthouses including various kinds of lenses. There is also the old clockwork, which turned the lens since 1898 and still until 1965 stood standby, should the electricity fail. After 1965 we were served by an emergency generator.

In an annex we have established a small café which serves refreshments. In co-operation with the local Tourist bureau we make available brochures concerning other nature and cultural highlights in the area.

The entrance fees charged are not sufficient to cover the running costs of a museum, but since opening, we have steadily improved our ability to promote ourselves.

The natural beauty of the area surrounding the lighthouses invites enjoyment and increases the interest in history. People can enjoy a picnic, and buy refreshments. This often leads to a visit to the museum and our small shop. We sell relevant products, such as models of lighthouses and ships. T-shirts and handbags with our lighthouse logo are our most successful items.

Weddings on top of the tower have been introduced in our PR-programme. No charge is levied, but the press coverage a wedding creates, is a goldmine. We have an arrangement with the world-wide engineering firm F.L. Schmidt, which has a training centre nearby. They use the lighthouses and the surrounding area for their management courses.

Between the two lighthouses lies the Lighthouse Inn. This year we have entered into an agreement with the inn, whereby a visit to the museum entitles one to buy coffee and cake for a reduced price, at the inn. This arrangement is mutually beneficial, as company parties and private occasions who eat at the Inn, then visit the museum, and afterwards return to the Inn for coffee. This arrangement has become very popular.

All the schools in the municipality have free access to the museum, along with a guided tour. This contact with the children and the youth often result in a visit by the whole family with picnic baskets.

Almost all museums have a support group of volunteers. Our support group is called Nakkehoved Lighthouse Guild. Our members help the museum in almost all aspects. Many of our programmes would not be possible – for economic reasons – if it were not for the support of the volunteers.

Last year we tried, for the first time, in co-operation with the Guild, to observe the International Day of the Lighthouses. We sent out a press release which, as always, was printed in the newspapers we have contact with. Access to the museum was free. We set up a barbecue alongside the West tower. The history of the lighthouses, and the optical telegraph was recounted. People brought their own meal and enjoyed themselves. In advance we had expected between 75 – 100 visitors. More than 300 came. This arrangement will be repeated this year, with the co-operation of the Lighthouse Inn, which will provide a meal in family-sized picnic baskets. We are expecting a large attendance that day.

One of our more energetic volunteers, retired Flight Controller Fritz Pedersen has an excellent knowledge of the optical telegraph, and during the course of the last 3 years has given 5 – 6 lectures during the summer period.

This year I will give a monthly talk on a Sunday, where I outline the history of the lighthouses. We expect a significant number of guests.

The 2009 season did not start well. As you maybe were aware, an earthquake with its epicentre in Malmø, Sweden hit us on December 16th 2008. The earthquake measured 4,3 on the Richter Scale. It shook the West tower so much, that the mercury tank, in which the lens rotates, splashed over the sides, and down into the engine room under the lens. This gave a sharply increased level of mercury gas, which resulted in the closing of the museum. After a very complicated cleaning process, and a series of control checks, the museum could open again on 21st May 2009.

Even though Nakkehoved Lighthouse Museum in its beautiful setting attracts a great number of visitors, it is important to investigate new initiatives, to help create the impression among our guests that a visit includes something new.

In the years to come Nakkehoved Lighthouse History Museum, in co-operation with the Guild and the Municipalities other museums will try to satisfy the increasing demand for special experiences voiced by a public eager to learn.