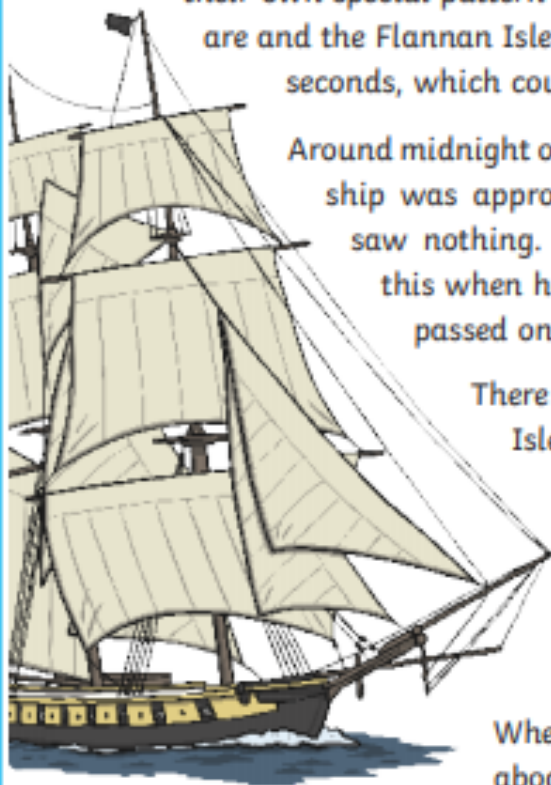


Reading Task

The Mystery of Flannan Isle

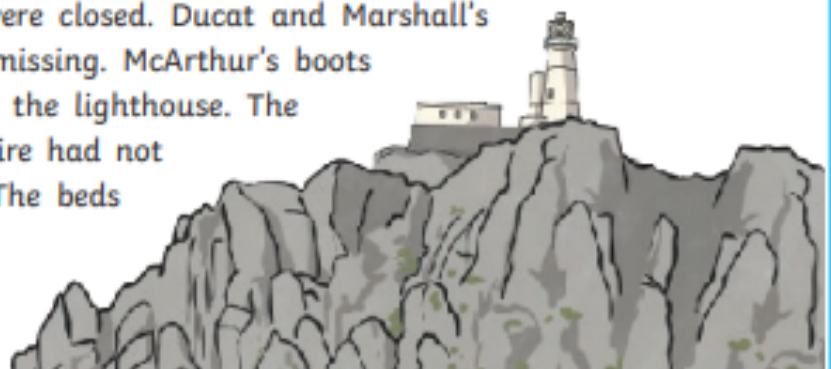
The Flannan Isles Lighthouse is found on Eilean Mor (one of the larger of the seven Flannan islands, eighteen miles north-west of the Scottish island of Lewis). These islands are also known as the Seven Hunters. The lighthouse was first lit to help keep passing ships safe on 7th December, 1899. All lighthouses have their own special pattern of light so that ships can identify where they are and the Flannan Isle light was two brilliant short flashes every 30 seconds, which could be seen 24 miles away in clear weather.



Around midnight on 15th December 1900, a captain on a passing ship was approaching the Flannan Isle Lighthouse, but he saw nothing. He thought this was strange and reported this when he arrived in port, however, his report was not passed on to the Northern Lighthouse Board.

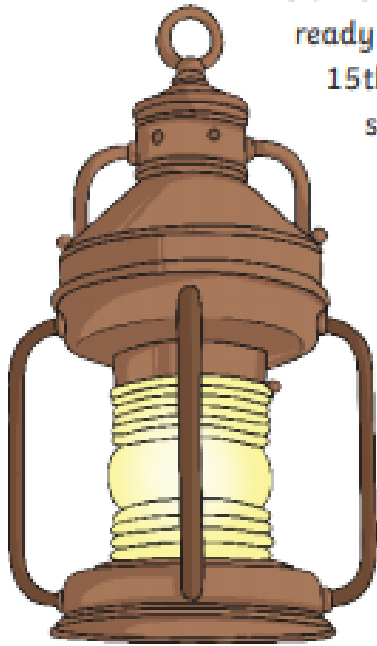
There were always three keepers stationed at Flannan Isle and a new crew were put on to the island every fortnight. The three keepers stationed at the lighthouse on 15th December, 1900 were James Ducat (the Head Keeper), Thomas Marshall (Second Assistant Keeper) and Donald McArthur (Occasional Keeper).

When the relief crew arrived on Flannan Isle aboard the ship the Hesperus on Boxing Day, 1900, eleven days had passed since the missing light was reported. The crew of the Hesperus could not see the lighthouse flags flying and thought the keepers had not seen them coming. The Hesperus sounded its horn and then fired a rocket but no one replied. The relief crew landed on the island, and they climbed the 160 steps up the cliffs to the lighthouse, calling the names of the keepers James, Thomas and Donald but they received no reply. The keepers had simply disappeared. The entrance gate and door to the lighthouse were closed. Ducat and Marshall's oilskins and boots were missing. McArthur's boots and oilskins were still in the lighthouse. The clocks had stopped; the fire had not been lit for some days. The beds were empty.



Reading Task

The Mystery of Flannan Isle



The last entries in the log book at the lighthouse were made on 15th December, 1900. James Ducat had made notes ready for transferring to his log book on the morning of 15th December and the lamp was ready to be lit. This suggested that the men disappeared on the afternoon of Saturday 15th December.

What happened on that afternoon? The three lighthouse keepers could not have left by boat; they did not have one. There was evidence of very bad weather on the west side of the island where railings had been damaged or washed away. Perhaps the men had left the lighthouse to check on some of their equipment and been swept away by a huge wave.

A poem called Flannan Isle was written by Wilfrid Wilson Gibson in 1912, twelve years after the discovery of the keepers' disappearance. It is, however, mostly written from the imagination.

Whatever happened to the three lighthouse keepers on Flannan Isle sadly remains a mystery to their families to this day. The Flannan Isles light still shines out to warn ships at sea, however, the light is lit automatically and no keepers live there.



Reading Task - questions

Now answer the questions in sentences:

1. What are the Flannan islands also known as?

2. When was the Flannan Isle Lighthouse first lit and why?

3. Who first reported that the light on Flannan Isle was out?

4. How often were the keepers on the lighthouse changed?

5. Why did the crew of the Hesperus think that the keepers had not seen them coming?

6. What did the crew of the Hesperus do to try and raise the keepers?

7. What evidence was there that the keepers had been gone for some days?

8. What evidence gave a clue to the disappearance of the keepers?

9. Who later wrote a poem about Flannan Isle?

10. Why do no keepers live at the Flannan Isles light today?

Reading Task - answers

1. What are the Flannan islands also known as?
The Flannan islands are also known as the Seven Hunters.
2. When was the Flannan Isle Lighthouse first lit and why?
The lighthouse was first lit to help keep passing ships safe on the 7th of December 1899.
3. Who first reported that the light on Flannan Isle was out?
A captain on a passing ship reported the missing light when he arrived in port.
4. How often were the keepers on the lighthouse changed?
A new crew were put on to the island every fortnight
5. Why did the crew of the Hesperus think that the keepers had not seen them coming?
The crew of the Hesperus could not see the Lighthouse flags flying and thought the keepers had not seen them coming.
6. What did the crew of the Hesperus do to try and raise the keepers?
The Hesperus sounded its horn and then fired a rocket to try and raise the keepers.
7. What evidence was there that the keepers had been gone for some days?
The clocks had stopped. The fire had not been lit for some days. The beds were empty. The log book was last written on 15th December.
8. What evidence gave a clue to the disappearance of the keepers?
There was evidence of very bad weather on the west side of the island where railings had been damaged or washed away; perhaps the men had left the lighthouse and been swept away by a huge wave.
9. Who later wrote a poem about Flannan Isle?
A poem called Flannan Isle was written by Wilfrid Wilson Gibson.
10. Why do no keepers live at the Flannan Isles light today?
The light is lit automatically so no keepers need to live there.