Henry Winstanley Encyclopedia Article

Henry Winstanley

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Henry Winstanley

1644-1703

English engineer who designed the first Eddystone Lighthouse, which greatly reduced shipping accidents off the Plymouth coast. An inventor known for his many bizarre contraptions, Winstanley owned two ships that in 1696 sank on the dangerous Eddystone Rocks 14 miles (22.5 km) from shore. He then resolved to build a lighthouse. Given its distance from inhabitable land—the Eddystone Rocks were, as their name indicated, mere rocks jutting from the sea—this was a formidable task. Simply digging the foundation took five months, but finally the lighthouse was completed in 1698. Five years later, Winstanley died in a violent storm that destroyed the lighthouse.