Philatelic Look at Wind Vanes on Lighthouses

By Garry Toth and Don Hillger

Introduction

The authors are meteorologists interested in all aspects of weather and climate on stamps, and also in scientific and environmental-observing satellites. During a recent trip to Sri Lanka one of us (Toth) visited the historic Galle Fort on the southwestern coast of the island. It dates from the Portuguese occupation of the late 1500s. The fortifications were built by the Dutch in the second half of the 17th Century. Galle Fort has been recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

There is a lighthouse at the southern end of Galle Fort, which two of G. Toth’s photographs serve to illustrate. From Figure 1 we see that construction probably started in 1938, and was completed in 1939. Figure 2 shows the full lighthouse. The authors are not experts on lighthouses, but as meteorologists our attention was drawn to the wind vane atop the structure. We wondered if there might be a stamp from Sri Lanka depicting the Galle Fort lighthouse with its vane, and whether or not there exist stamps from other countries depicting wind vanes on lighthouses.

Background

Early lighthouses were maintained by human lighthouse keepers who had to tend the light. With the development of reliable meteorological instrumentation and wireless communications, it would have been logical to install weather observing instruments on some of those lighthouses so the keepers could obtain detailed information, such as wind speed and direction, which they could then transmit to nearby mariners. In some cases the keeper could also send the data to the national meteorological service of the country in question. In return, the keeper might receive weather forecasts which he could in turn re-transmit to mariners. To the authors’ knowledge, most lighthouses continuing to function have now been automated. Our impression is that the modern weather observing network does not always include instruments on automated lighthouses, possibly because of questions of jurisdiction, cost, maintenance and data representativity. Some automated lighthouses probably have modern instruments, while others may include wind vanes that are no more than legacy instruments from an earlier period in their history, and yet others have no weather instruments at all. In this article we do not consider further such details, but rather simply undertake the pleasant task of exploring lighthouse stamps for the presence of wind vanes (or, rarely, anemometers). It turns out that there are many such stamps. In a large number of items, the wind vane is quite small and can be rather hard to discern, particularly in a reproduced image. We present in this article a selection of the best examples of wind vanes on stamps and other philatelic items.

The interested reader will find a complete listing, with images, of wind vanes on stamps and other philatelic items in the wind vanes section of the authors’ web page http://rammb.cira.colostate.edu/dev/hillger/anemometers.htm#windvanes (that web page is a small subset of our full website on weather and climate philately). In that wind vanes page, lighthouse items that include vanes are highlighted in pale yellow. The philatelic illustrations in this article come from that page. In addition, that page features photographs of many of the lighthouses with vanes, which can be compared with the stamps. This has been useful in many cases in which the vane is difficult to see in the stamp.

Asia

We start our brief world lighthouse tour back in Sri Lanka. A set of four “Lighthouses of Sri Lanka” stamps issued in 1976 features lighthouses with wind vanes. They are found together in Scott 1150a, a MS4. The Galle lighthouse with its vane is in Scott 1150 (Figure 3a). We can compare that image with Figure 3b which shows Scott 1149. It depicts a similar wind vane on the Devinuwara lighthouse, which is located on the south coast of the country.
A Japanese stamp issued in 1968 (Scott 974) shows wind vanes on the old and new Kannonzaki lighthouses (Figure 4). The Republic of China (Taiwan) issued a series of stamps featuring lighthouses in the years from 1989 through 1992. One of them, Scott 2680, shows the Hua Yu lighthouse (Figure 5). That vane is seen more clearly in the cachet of the first day cover with Taiwan 2679 and 2683C (Figure 6). The lighthouse is not identified in the cachet, but is so similar to the one in Taiwan Scott 2680 that we feel confident that they are the same.

**Oceania**

Australia and New Zealand have long coastlines with many lighthouses. A beautiful stamp issued by NZ in 2009 (Scott 2264a) shows the Cape Reinga lighthouse with a nicely-defined wind vane (Figure 7). Several other stamps from NZ also show this lighthouse. The Wollongong lighthouse, in New South Wales, Australia, is nicely depicted with its wind vane in two similar cancels from 1995 and 1998 (Figures 8 and 9). The Macquarie lighthouse and wind vane are depicted in Australia 458, issued in 1968 (Figure 10). New Caledonia Scott 844, issued in 2000, emphasizes the Amédée lighthouse structure with its tall thin design (Figure 11). The wind vane with its four directional arms is nicely depicted in the stamp in a close-up view as well as in the full view of the lighthouse.

**Africa**

An unlisted and probably bogus SS1 from Benin, issued in 2003, shows a nice wind vane on the red and white lighthouse in the margin (Figure 12). This is the Cape Agulhas lighthouse in South Africa. The authors have noticed that in some cases a lighthouse appears in multiple stamps. This is one such case. The Cape Agulhas lighthouse, with the wind vane more or less visible, is also found in the stamp and margin of a SS1 from 2007 from Guinea Republic (unlisted as far as we can tell), a 2005 stamp from a MS4 from Ivory Coast (catalogue number unknown) and Scott South Africa 716, 1988. There may be others as well. Images of all those are found in the web page noted above. Another unlisted time from Guinea-Bissau, shows a different lighthouse with a nice vane in the margin (Figure 13). This stamp was issued in 2008. The name of the lighthouse is not given, but we have been able to identify it as the Eddystone-4 lighthouse in Great Britain. The lighthouse is not only from a different country than the stamp, it is also from a different continent. As a final African example, we present Namibia Scott 1190-1192 FDC, from 2010 (Figure 14). The $4.40 value stamp shows the Swakopmund lighthouse with a barely-visible wind vane on top. However, the cancel, which appears to show the top of that same lighthouse, also includes a nice drawing of the wind vane and its four directional arms.
Europe

Europe’s many countries provide a wide variety of lighthouse stamps, some with wind vanes. A few such stamps appear on maxicards with detailed images of the lighthouse, so that the wind vane is easily seen. For example, while a vane is visible atop the Cabo Mondego lighthouse in Portugal Scott 1705, issued in 1987, it is more easily seen in the maxi image (Figure 15), and in fact one can also see it in the cancel on that item. Similarly, the stamp and maxi of Romania Scott 4251, issued in 1998, show two wind vanes and the directional arms on the Genovese lighthouse (Figure 16). Denmark Scott 1055, from 1996, includes a fine image of the Fornæs lighthouse and its vane (Figure 17). Another clear vane is depicted on Latvia’s Liepajas lighthouse in Scott 756, from 2009 (Figure 18). A nice postal card from Germany, issued in 2007, shows the decorative wind vane atop the Mielstack lighthouse in

detail of a wind vane with its four directional arms on an unknown lighthouse (Figure 20). The authors would be interested to hear from anyone who can identify this lighthouse.

South America and the Caribbean

The Punta Brava lighthouse in Uruguay is featured on Scott 1858d, issued in 2000. It is one of a set of four lighthouse stamps issued in a MS4. The information on the stamp indicates that the lighthouse dates from the year 1876. The stamp includes two vanes that are small but still not difficult to discern (Figure 21). St. Lucia Scott 294 is found in Figure 22. It was issued in 1971 and nicely depicts the Moule à Chique lighthouse, with its wind vane. Another Caribbean stamp with a lighthouse and vane is Trinidad and Tobago Scott 679 (Figure 23). From 2003, it features the Chacachacare lighthouse.

North America

The US has issued several sets of stamps featuring American lighthouses. US Scott 4411, from the 2009 set, nicely depicts the Biloxi, Mississippi lighthouse and its wind vane (Figure 24). It dates from 1848 and was one of the first cast iron lighthouses in the southeastern US. It has become a widely-recognized symbol of Biloxi. US Scott 4146, issued in 2007 as part of a set of Pacific lighthouses, shows the famous Diamond Head (Hawaii) lighthouse with its vanes and two directional arms (Figure 25). The current structure, built in 1917, is one of the most iconic of the Pacific lighthouses. It is on the Diamond Head promontory just east of Honolulu. The lighthouse is also featured on the cover of US Scott 4150b, the prestige booklet in which the set was issued. The Five Finger lighthouse in southeastern Alaska is depicted in US Scott 4147, which is part of the same set as the Diamond Head stamp. This lighthouse is on a small island roughly 100 km south of Juneau. The existing structure dates from 1935. The depiction is unusual because two propeller anemometers, rather than just one or more wind vanes, are included. They are rather small but unmistakable (Figure 26).
Our last example comes from Canada. The Fisgard lighthouse, near Victoria, was built by the British in 1860. Canada Scott 1033, issued in 1984, depicts the lighthouse and its vane. A nice Canada Post postcard with a reproduction of that stamp (Figure 26) shows them clearly.

Conclusion
In this brief tour of lighthouses around the world, we have featured philatelic items that depict wind vanes (or, rarely, anemometers) atop the structure. In comparisons with photographs of many of the lighthouses, we have found that lighthouses with vanes on stamps generally really do have those vanes. We hope the lighthouse philatelists who read this article will find our unusual approach to the topic interesting and worthwhile. As mentioned above, the list of wind vanes on stamps in our website includes many more examples of lighthouses with vanes than have been presented here.

If the reader is aware of any items that have been missed, the authors would be grateful to receive that information at the email addresses given below, so that the missing items can be added.

Biographical notes
The authors have researched and written extensively on the subjects of weather, climate, and un-manned satellites on stamps and covers. For the full set of online philatelic material by the authors, see Collective Philatelic Works of Two Meteorologists at http://rammb.cira.colostate.edu/dev/hillger/.

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Eye of the Lens

Lighthouse Postal Stationery

New Caledonia Pret a Pret envelope