

EXTRACT FROM THE VISITOR'S GUIDE

The history of the timeball tower is in three distinct phases:

1. From 1796 to 1814 a *shutter telegraph* stood on the site, relaying information between the Admiralty in London and the Naval Yard *via* a line of twelve shutter stations. Other lines ran from the Admiralty to Portsmouth, Plymouth, and Yarmouth.

2. The present tower was built in 1820-21 to carry a *semaphore* – a signalling device that was faster and more efficient than the telegraph. Expense precluded the replacement of all the telegraph lines, so only that to Portsmouth was completed. The semaphore at Deal was used by the *Coast Blockade for the Suppression of Smuggling* to send information to other Blockade stations around the coast of Kent and Sussex. Deal was the headquarters of the Blockade until it was disbanded in 1831. Soon after this, visual signalling was replaced by the *electric telegraph* that worked regardless of the time of day, or the weather.

3. From 1855, the Tower carried a *timeball*. This was linked to the Royal Observatory, Greenwich, by electric telegraph wires running alongside the railway. At 1p.m. each day, a signal was sent from *Greenwich to all timeballs* (including Deal) in England, thus *synchronizing* their drops. This time signal allowed ships anchored in the Downs to check the *accuracy of their chronometers* – essential for accurate navigation – before setting off on long voyages. It ceased official operation in 1927.