



Hilbre Island from Middle Eye

From the slipway (3), where the road climbs up to the main island, notice Middle Eye (2) behind you, then Little Eye (1) beyond that. On Little Eye stood a landmark, the stone base of which can still be seen, which helped to guide shipping through the sandbanks to Wales.

As you go up the slope, you will see retaining walls (4) which were built in the 1890s by masons working for the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company who then owned Hilbre. There was an earlier landmark (removed in about 1830) on the southern end of the island (5).

The pond (6) is probably artificial, and may have been a duck decoy. It was enlarged by the members of the Hilbre Club, a gentleman's club from Liverpool, which leased the Buoymaster's house at the end of the nineteenth century.

From this point, if you look west towards Wales during low tide, a colony of Atlantic Grey Seals can be seen hauled out on a sandbank.

The larger mound (7) is an air raid shelter and generator room from World War II. This generator powered lights on Middle Eye, which were used as a decoy for bombers aiming for Liverpool.

The three privately owned bungalows (8), (9) and (10) were built between 1890 and 1920 by local families. The first was originally a navvie's hut on the Manchester Ship Canal and was dismantled and brought to Hilbre by barge. The third and most southerly building is now the Hilbre Bird Observatory, which was set up on Hilbre in the 1950s, and moved into its present building in 1989.

The sandstone roofless shed (11) in the fenced paddock was built or rebuilt as a stable by one of the tenants in the 1880s. A medieval grave slab, found on Hilbre about 15 years earlier and been used as a gatepost, was transferred to the end wall. It has since been removed to the parish museum in West Kirby, but the mark where it used to be can still be seen.

Another grave marker, a Saxon/Norse cross head, was found nearby in 1845 by the Keeper and his daughter. It is now in the Grosvenor Museum, Chester.

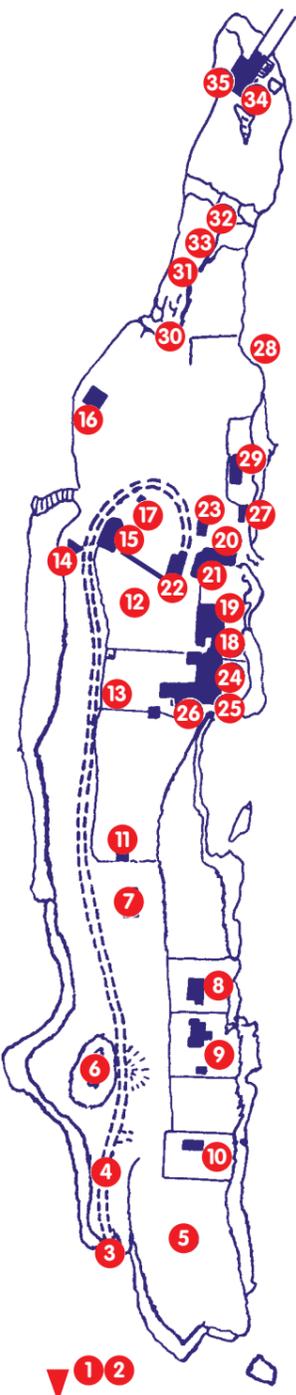
There are private gardens (12) behind the tall fences, where Hilbre's Victorian residents grew vegetables and fruit trees. In the Buoymaster's garden is a wire netting Heligoland trap (13), used by the Hilbre Bird Observatory to catch birds, which are ringed and released and can then be traced if they are caught again anywhere in the world.

The tall mast (14) was a giant theodolite used to measure the height of sandbanks in Liverpool Bay. It is now redundant, as this has been taken over by satellite surveying and depth sounding. The present mast replaced an earlier one in the 1960s.

The white building with the semi-circular window is the Telegraph Station (15) built by the Trustees of Liverpool Docks in 1841 as part of a chain of signal stations which ran from Holyhead in Anglesey to Liverpool. They relayed weather conditions and other important information to and from the ships at sea and the port. The round objects in the window panes are binnacles to support telescopes.

The white, solar powered beacon (16) is the latest navigation mark put up by Trinity House who manage lighthouses in England and Wales.

The concrete base (17) marks where the mast and boom, which held the storm-warning cone, was situated. The cones were raised to warn local shipping of storms about to break. The canvas cone was hung pointing upward for gales from the north, and downward for southerly gales.



Atlantic Grey Seals on West Hoyle Bank

The colony of Atlantic Grey Seals spend most of its time hauled out on the sandbank. The numbers increase to over 500 during the summer, but fall to about 50 during autumn when the adults swim to west Wales to breed.



Tide Gauge

Arguably, Britain's most important tide gauge, its clockwork mechanism must be wound every week, and the paper changed every fortnight. Every large ship crossing the Mersey Bar must find out the Hilbre tide height.



Dunlin

From September onwards, many thousands of these small waders visit us after breeding in the arctic summer. The shores around the Hilbre Islands can be likened to a well stocked supermarket for these hungry winter visitors.



Meadow Pipit

Hilbre's commonest nesting bird, the males' 'parachuting' display and call can be seen and heard all over the island when the weather is good.

The complex of Victorian buildings has come down to us with few alterations. The middle section is probably all that is left of the public house (18), called the Seagull Inn and run by Joseph Hickson between the 1790s and the 1830s.

The attached white building with the tall chimneystack (19) is Telegraph House and was built in 1841 to house the telegraph keeper and family. The outbuildings associated with this building, the stable (20), goatshed and pigsty (21) and storeroom/bunkroom (22) were built at approximately the same time. A cartshed (23) in the yard is probably older than it looks, as it appears on Victorian maps. The sump for liquids from the stable lies next to it. These and the contents of the earth closet ensured that Hilbre's vegetable gardens were very fertile.

On the opposite side to Telegraph House is the Buoymaster's house (24), in which the Buoymaster and his family lived. It was the Buoymaster's responsibility to ensure all the navigation buoys in the Dee, the Mersey and Liverpool Bay were kept in good repair and were correctly positioned. To aid him in this was the Buoymaster's workshop (25) and store (26).

Somewhere under the present buildings may be the foundations of a chapel and house owned by Chester Abbey (later the Cathedral). Two monks at a time and their servants lived here for nearly 400 years until the dissolution of the Abbey in 1538 by Henry VIII. The island was then leased to local families, and used as a shipping depot.



Telegraph Station (15)

Near the small stone and brick boatshed (27) on the cliff top, a slipway leads down to the shore, where there are remains of the seawater channels feeding the 17th & 18th century salt boiling works (28). There were four salt pans planned for the island. Only these channels, and cinders in the soil, remain.

The green building (29) of the Mersey Canoe Club, who first came onto the island in 1880 and then built this clubhouse in 1900, is a Victorian reminder of the importance of Hilbre to yachting and sailing at that time. The club still maintains its presence here.

As you walk northwards, you will notice small retaining walls (30), built by volunteers in recent years to break the waves washing over the island in storms, and therefore preventing the soil and vegetation from being washed away.

Two stone bridges (31) and (32) with carvings were erected in the 1970s using stone from Birkenhead demolition sites. They are not relics of the monks' time, nor are the rectangular holes (33) cut into the rock, even though one story states they are monks' graves. It is more likely that they are the foundations of the northern landmark, shown in maps and drawings until the 1820s or 1830s.

The ruined Lifeboat station (34), which was built in 1839 and used until 1939. The crew was the same as for the Hoylake station, which still operates today. The Hilbre boat was used at low tide, as the Hoylake boat could not be pulled over the sand to deep water until tractors came into use. The crew ran or rode on horseback over the sand to Hilbre from Hoylake, whilst the Telegraph Keeper on Hilbre opened the doors ready for the boat, powered only by oars and a small sail, to slide down rails once the crew were aboard.

The overhead wooden building is a modern hide for watching seabirds.

The Victorian tide gauge (35), in the bricked off part of the Lifeboat station is still powered by a clockwork mechanism and is used to plot the height of tides. This information is necessary for the large ships entering Liverpool, and is used to calculate the predictions for tides in the future.

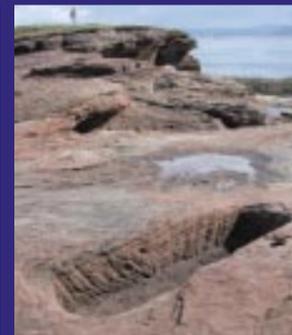


Telegraph House (19), Site of Seagull Inn (18) and Buoymaster's House (24)



Lifeboat Station

The now ruined Lifeboat station was built in 1849. It was last used in 1939, when the nearby Hoylake Lifeboat station changed from using horses to launch their lifeboat, to using a diesel powered tractor.



Landmark Footings

Often mistaken for graves, or even a monks bath, these holes, of which there are eight in all, show the position of the beacon which was made of wood and may have stood 5m tall.



Thrift

Best seen in late spring, Thrift or Sea Pink throws a splash of colour over Hilbre which lasts through until early summer.



Rock Sea Lavender

Rock Sea Lavender grows on rocky sea cliffs within the splash zone, and is Hilbre's most important plant. This sub-species is found in only 5 places in the world.



A 3-4 hour self guided walk to Hilbre Island

exploring | walking | birdwatching | cycling | sailing | horseriding | we've got the lot



Explore! The history of Hilbre Island

Hilbre Islands Local Nature Reserve

The three tidal islands lying at the mouth of the Dee Estuary, Little Eye, Middle Eye and Hilbre, are designated a Local Nature Reserve.

Access to the Local Nature Reserve is free of charge. Groups are restricted to 50 people and permits are required in advance for any group of 6 or more persons. Permits are available from the Visitor Centre, Wirral Country Park, Station Road, Thurstaston, Wirral, CH61 OHN.
Tel: 0151-648-4371/3884

The Visitor Centre is open daily from 10 am. - 5 pm.

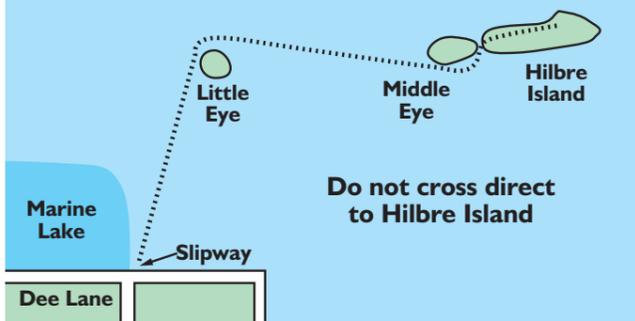
Access to Hilbre is by foot, across the two miles from West Kirby. To get to West Kirby from the M53, leave at junction 2 and follow the West Kirby signs; then follow the brown Marine Lake signs, which will bring you into Dee Lane. Alternatively from Chester, take the A540 to Hoylake, at West Kirby follow the Marine Lake signs to Dee Lane.

The Islands are cut off from the mainland by the tide for up to five hours out of every twelve. If you are planning a visit to the Islands you must find out the time of high water, and allow yourself enough time so that you can leave Hilbre at least three hours before high water, or 3½ hours on large tides 9.5 metres and higher, even longer if you have small children or walk slowly, when your crossing time for the 2 miles may take more than the 1 hour allowed for in the above times.

Alternatively, you must set out from West Kirby at least three hours before high water, or 3½ hours on large tides 9.5 metres and higher before high water to allow for a stay of five hours or more on Hilbre. Strong winds may bring the tide in early or suddenly. Please ring 0151-648 4371/ 3884 for advice on tide times. Tide tables can be bought locally and are on display at Dee Lane slipway.



The Safest Route to Hilbre Island

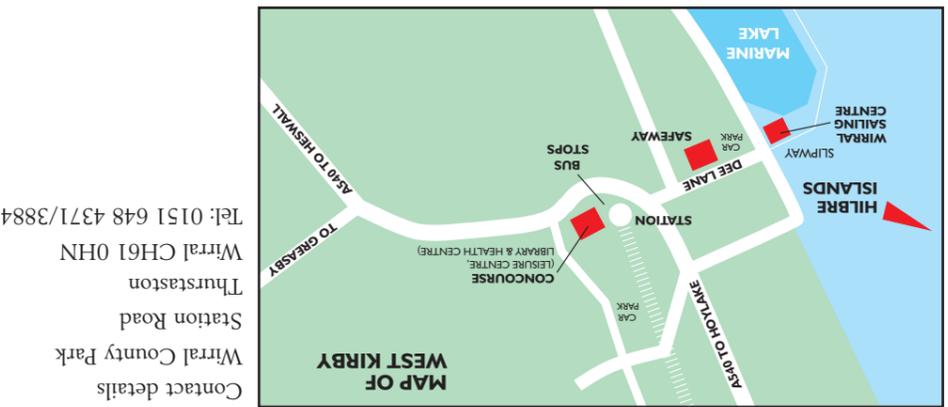


Explore! leaflets are part of a series promoting walks and cycle rides in Chester, Ellesmere Port, and the Wirral. You can obtain these and more from the following Tourist Information Centres. They can all book accommodation, give you information about places to wine and dine and provide tickets for theatres, attractions like Chester Zoo and the Blue Planet and coach tours.

- Chester: Town Hall or Chester Visitor Centre
Tel: 01244 402111
email: tis@chestercc.gov.uk
www.chestertourism.com
- Ellesmere Port and Neston:
Cheshire Oaks (J7, M53)
Tel: 0151 356 7879
email: cheshireoakstic@btconnect.com
www.ellesmereport.gov.uk
- Wirral: Woodside Ferry Terminal, Birkenhead CH41 6DU
Tel: 0151 647 6780
email: dlist@wirral.gov.uk
www.wirral.gov.uk

CARE IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

- Remember that the countryside is a working environment where people make their living. Even empty grass fields are important to a farmer's income.
- Please respect the countryside and the people who live and work there. Help us keep the countryside alive and a place where people are pleased to welcome visitors.
- Make use of local shops and pubs.
- Don't let dogs chase livestock or wildlife.
- Please keep to paths/rights of way through farmland
- Please report any problems to Metropolitan Borough of Wirral. Tel 0151 648 4371.
- Leave farm gates as you find them.
- Watch out for horses and people on country lanes.
- Don't park in gateways or on verges (remember that farm machinery is large and needs lots of room to manoeuvre even through village highstreets).



Contact details
Wirral County Park
Station Road
Thurstaston
Wirral CH61 OHN
Tel: 0151 648 4371/3884

This leaflet has been produced in partnership with the Friends of Hilbre.

There are no shops, public toilets or any fresh water on the Islands, and very little shelter. Toilets are available at Dee Lane slipway, West Kirby; open 10 am. - 6 pm. (summer only) During bad weather some shelter may be available for parties visiting Hilbre, but this cannot be guaranteed, so please allow for this in your preparations. Always carry waterproofs and extra or warm clothing, and in winter food and a hot drink are essential. Always wear some form of footwear when visiting the Islands preferably wellingtons, as rocks, barnacles and broken glass can cause serious injuries, the commonest cause of injury is slipping on the seaweed/mud covered rocks. The weather can change very quickly, and exposure can occur even in summer.

We recommend the safest route to Hilbre Island is to start from the slipway at Dee Lane, next to the Marine Lake, walk towards Little Eye, the smallest of the three islands, keeping it on your right. As soon as you pass Little Eye turn right and continue on the sand passing Middle Eye on your left. Between Middle Eye and Hilbre take the rough track over the rocks towards the south end of Hilbre.

Do not cross direct to Hilbre Island, and do not cross from Hoylake.

HELP PROTECT THE HILBRE ISLANDS

- Protect Wildlife:** All plants and animals in the Local Nature Reserve are protected. Please do not collect any living creatures, pick or damage any plants.
- Please avoid disturbing the roosting birds in winter.
- Please keep to the paths or rocks to avoid trampling plants or eroding soil.
- No Overnight Stays:** Camping or overnight stays are not permitted on the Nature Reserve.
- Don't Leave Litter:** Litter not only looks unsightly, but can be dangerous to both humans and animals. Take your litter home.
- Dogs:** Dogs must be kept on a lead at all times whilst on the Nature Reserve.
- Fires:** Fires are not permitted on the Islands. Please be careful to ensure that you do not cause one. If you see a fire please contact the Ranger or Fire Brigade.
- Paths:** Please keep to the main path or the short mown areas on Hilbre.
- Private gardens:** Please respect private gardens and do not enter any fenced off areas.