



Port Sunlight River Park

Refuse to Recreation – a history trail based on local memories

“I love the park, it’s a place of tranquillity but also drama. I’ve been here at sunrise to see the sun rise over the Mersey, I’ve watched fireworks, been here with my family and my friends. It’s just beautiful and lovely – good in every way.”

Alison McGovern, Chair of Friends of Port Sunlight River Park and Member of Parliament for Wirral South

Directions

Port Sunlight River Park, Dock Road North, New Ferry, Wirral, Merseyside, CH62 4TQ. Satnav is unreliable. No access from Dock Road South. Use postcode CH62 4LN for navigation.

From Liverpool, Birkenhead and Eastham follow the A41 towards Port Sunlight. Follow the brown signs at the end of the New Ferry Bypass, turn into Bolton Road East, follow it round to the right and it becomes Dock Road North. There is a small car park with 2 disabled places plus street parking. Buses Shore Drive 5 minutes’ walk. Train Port Sunlight: 15 minutes’ walk. Bike Wirral Circular Trail.

For further information go to <https://sites.google.com/view/portsunlightriverpark-history/> More information is available in the River Park Heritage Centre and further contributions are welcome. We have tried to acknowledge photographs and contributors and apologise for any omissions.



This leaflet was funded through HLF Sharing Heritage grant.



images front cover view to Liverpool (© Giles Rocholl Photography) 1 totem pole sculpture by Mike Owens (Colin Armstrong Liles [CAL]) 2 open day crowds walking up to the summit (Land Trust) 3 Bromborough Pool School (Sarah Saxton) 4 landfill (Biffa) 5 Grandpa’s chair (CAL) 6 navigation lights with UU outflow (Tony Doherty) 7 Black Tailed Godwits on lake (Ron Thomas) 8 wastewater treatment works (CAL) 10 The Esplanade (CAL) 11 dredger (Unilever Archives) 12 Orwell in lock gates (Unilever Archives) 13 Bailey Bridge (CAL) 14 Heritage Centre (Andrew Jennings-Giles) © neatnik design 2021

Welcome to Port Sunlight River Park History Trail

The 32 hectare park opened in 2014 after transformation from a closed landfill site. It’s a popular community space with varied paths, wildlife, wildflowers and wetland areas. The River Park is managed by Autism Together on behalf of the Land Trust who lease the area from both Biffa and UML (Unilever).

As the landfill is still settling, items from the capping material find their way to the surface. It is important for your safety and the safety of your children and dogs that you always keep to the surfaced paths.

The trail has been produced by Friends of Port Sunlight River Park from interviews with local residents and site workers. The distance is 3km with an additional 600m walk to return to the car park. The trail will take about 90 minutes to complete. Please use the QR codes for more information on the Geotourist trail and the website.

1 Sculpture

This land was reclaimed from the River Mersey when Bromborough Dock was built in the 1920s. Local children wanted to call it Bromborough Pool Park because of the dock and the fact that it was next to Bromborough Pool Village. Where you are standing was the shoreline of the river. Walk along the tarmac path to look for the mooring bollard inside the Gas2Energy plant. Then return to the totem pole, created by Mike Owens, from oak grown in his North Wales woodland. Which animals can you find?



Facing the sculpture, turn left on the stone path and follow the zigzag path up the hill. At the bench turn right up the hill. Continue to the next bench and post 2.

2 Landfill maintenance and PLUTO Hill

Look down to the car park. On the left is the Gas2Energy Plant which takes the gas off the site generating electricity for the National Grid. To the right are two Leachate Plant tanks which remove the dirty water from the site and clean it. Behind the car park, was the Land and Marine site until 2017. Looking back down the path and to the left of the path is the PLUTO Hill, part of a storage system to supply fuel for the allied invasion of Europe in WWII.



Continue up the hill. At the T junction turn right and continue to post 3.

3 Bromborough Dock and Bromborough Pool Village

Look for the long low building stretching from the River Mersey inland. The grassy area extending to where you are standing was once Bromborough Dock, opened in 1931 to bring sea going ships to Port Sunlight. Look for the flat roofed brick Dock Manager’s building. Beyond this is Bromborough Pool Village with its cricket green, school, church, village hall and workers’ houses. Look for the line of trees beyond the former Price’s Candle Works site office. This is the Old Courthouse woodland, a place where Edward I held court in 1277. In future, a riverside path will link both sites.



Turn back up the hill. At the T junction continue straight ahead to post 4.

4 Landfill operation

In this area are some of the nearly 900 monitoring points in the park. Biffa staff manage these each week. The initial planning permission for the park restricted the height of the landfill, which was later extended to 37m height. Residents complained of the smell, flies, pests and lost their view when the landfill was built but when the park was planned, they came up, “Seeing those views for the first time, it was just absolutely spectacular” Mark. In 2019 the fence in front of you was erected to provide a safe area for ground nesting birds, like skylarks.



Continue along the summit to ‘Grandpa’s Chair’.

Port Sunlight River Park



5 Summit

Walk past 'Grandpa's Chair' to the post to look out over Liverpool or take in the sights of the Wirral. Both benches here were made by Mike Owens. Looking over Wirral on a clear day you can see Moel Famau in Wales, with the rise of Storeton Woods in the mid distance. Nearer you can see the flat green roof of the Bebington Oval Sports Centre and nearby the Lady Lever Art Gallery in Port Sunlight. To the left follow the line of Bolton Rd through the factory village of Port Sunlight to the spire of St Andrew's Church in Bebington. Residents remember the area thriving with dock related industry and Park Hampers.



Go back to the junction taking the path on the left downhill towards the Mersey. Carry on around the bend to the post just past the benches.

6 River Mersey features

This path is gentler to protect the pipeline from the oil terminal at Tranmere that runs along Mersey View walk, so it is suitable for pushchairs and wheelchairs. From the benches you can observe some of the more than 100 species of birds recorded here. This vantage point was well used when the Three Queens, the Cunard Liners, visited Liverpool in 1915. In the river look out for the navigation lights and buoys. These guide ships safely either into the Garston channel to Garston docks on the far side of the river, or along the closer channel to Mersey Wharf, Eastham docks and the Manchester Ship Canal.



At the end of the slope you will see signposts. Take the path to the left and then immediately right to go round the lake and to post 7.

7 Lake View

The lake rests on around 9m of silt deposited here and throughout the site from silt dredged to keep the Mersey clear for shipping. Residents remember that the river was very smelly and dirty in the past. A pipeline from the wastewater treatment plant passes under the lake and the outfall is adjacent to the Navigation lights in the estuary. Ducks, swans, moorhens, coots, are regular inhabitants of the lake, with black tailed godwits amongst the regular seasonal visitors.



Carry on with the lake to your right. At the junction turn right and look for the information board.

8 Wastewater Treatment Plant

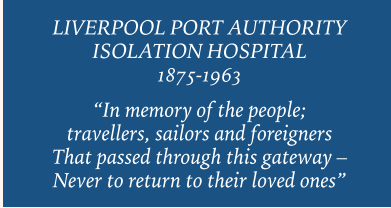
As you turn right walking around the lake there's an unexpected sight, a large industrial plant, on the left. This is Bromborough Wastewater Treatment Works which replaced a previous water treatment plant in the 1970s. When the PLUTO hill was extended for this work residents lost their view of the river. As the height of the landfill increased residents in New Ferry also lost their view. As vans and lorries access the works via the service road that runs next to the car park at the Dock Road North entrance, visitors need to exercise caution when crossing into the park. The information board gives an overview of the processes involved in providing water and removing wastewater locally.



Continue with the lake on your right to post 9 near the steps.

9 Shorefields and the mudflats

This entrance to the park has a cycle ramp on both sets of steps and is part of the Wirral Circular Trail. Liverpool Port Authority Isolation Hospital, 1875-1963, now a woodland and New Ferry Baths – an open-air swimming pool, were located nearby. For more information, visit New Ferry Online. Look out for the Tranmere Oil Terminal and Cammell Lairds ahead. At low tide, the exposed mud provides feeding grounds for many wading birds including redshank, oystercatcher and curlew, with the River Park providing a high tide roost for black tailed godwit. The shore has international recognition for its bird diversity as shown on the panel at the next post.



Continue around the lake to the post 10 near the information board.

10 The Sloyne

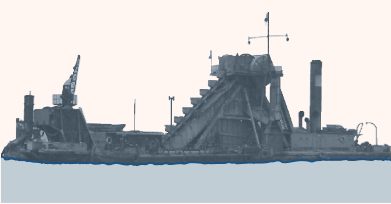
This area of the Mersey, called the Sloyne, is where the merchant training ships Indefatigable, Conway, Akbar and Clarence were moored. The ships educated orphaned and poor sons of sailors from 1850s to May 1941. Ships were scrapped here, including, in 1889, Brunel's SS Great Eastern; the largest ship the world had ever seen at that time. Beyond the mudflats, on the left, the row of red brick terraced houses, the Esplanade, facing onto the river is remembered by a resident: "When we lived at the Esplanade the river was so busy [with] ships [going] up the Manchester ship canal, it was a very busy place. [The] Conway was used as some sort of a training ship and was moored in the river" Phyllis.



Take the left fork of the path down towards the river.

11 Mersey View Walk

Look out for the concrete bases of the decanting towers, used when silt was deposited here. Under your feet are crude oil pipelines that carry 9 million tonnes of oil every year from Tranmere, where the ships from the North Sea, Mediterranean and West Africa berth, to Stanlow oil refinery. Access covers can be seen in the path and look out for a pipeline marker – the white pole with the red hat, at the end of the path. The fence prevents disturbance to wading birds on the mussel beds at low tide. Directly across the river are two more former landfill sites: Otterspool Prom and The International Garden Festival, created in 1984.



Continue along Mersey View walk to the car park. Post 12 is near the anchor.

12 Lock Entrance to the Dock

The remains of the lock entrance to Bromborough Dock can be seen in the curve in the wall for the lock gates, the bollards, capstan and pulley wheels and the two tide gauges showing the height of water (in feet); one for the river and the other for the dock. When opened by Lever's, in 1931, the largest private dock in the world, it brought in Feldspar from Norway, wood from Scandinavia and West Africa, palm and coconut oils; and whale products. Ships would enter and leave on the high tide. Mooring on the 'Wall' was not allowed but now there are two berths for ships in the river at Mersey Wharf. At low tide, their hulls rest on the silt.



With your back to the Mersey walk past the dinghies to the post near the fence.

13 Weighbridge

The Bailey Bridge to your left, was the route into the landfill site from the weighbridge on the far side of the River Dibbin. "Every wagon had to be weighed for payment ... They'd ... go up to the landfill, tip their waste and we'd take the empty weight of the vehicle so we knew how much they'd tipped" Jane, weighbridge operator. All sorts of waste came through: household, general, waste from the oil refinery, and local factories, special waste, asbestos and hazardous waste and chicken feathers – the smell was unbelievable! There were traffic lights on the bridge to hold back the traffic when hazardous waste arrived.



Go to the Heritage Centre for more information.

14 River Park Heritage Centre

The River Park Heritage Centre was opened by Mayor of Wirral Cllr Geoffrey Watt, on 2nd April 2019, World Autism Awareness Day. It stands on the site of the Dock Pump House and its conversion from the original landfill site office, built in 1970s, was funded through Heritage Lottery Fund. Staff remember the footprint of the building is exactly the same as when the offices were there, with the porch added. It was a grubby place, the guys that worked on the diggers and the compactors got changed there so there were showers, toilets, kitchens and offices. From November 2014 it was the ranger, volunteer and Autism Together base for events and activities.



Come inside to find out more.