

Barry Island Notes

Railway Station

Before 1884, the area was entirely rural, with a small population settled in the villages and farms.

Some visitors would make it over in the 1800s and stay in the only farmhouse on the island. The Rev J Evans in 1803 makes no mention of smugglers, but however, spoke of the small farmhouse which was by the time of his visit 'fitted up as a lodging house, for those desirous of sea-bathing in retirement.' Barry Island was evidently safe enough to accommodate its first tourists.

The peninsula was an island until the 1880s when it was linked to the mainland as the town of Barry expanded. This was partly due to the opening of Barry Dock by the Barry Railway Company. Established by David Davies, the docks now link up the gap which used to form Barry Island.

Whitmore Bay, the rapid expansion of which was triggered by the arrival of the railway in 1896. Bathing machines had appeared on the sands in 1891 and, in the same year, refreshment rooms were opened overlooking the beach below the entrance to Friars Point House. Harbour Road (the causeway) was completed in 1897, which meant that road access to the island was no longer across the docks. With good links to the mainland and the valleys in place, tourism developed rapidly in the 1890s.

In 1899, the railway was extended to the Pier Head via a tunnel, which enabled the growth of the pleasure steamer trade. Closure of [Barry Pier](#) station in 1976.

Heritage Railway

Moved here from Cardiff Dock in 2007. Line ran parallel to the line we came in on and went to Barry. Originally intended to extend to Barry Dock. Private transport operator Cambrian Transport subsequently took over the lease in December 2009 and they now run the heritage line as the [Barry Tourist Railway](#). Railway Ceases Operating Trains and Transport for Wales takes over land

Docks

The first sod at Barry Dock was cut by Lord Windsor in November 1884. Water was let into the then 73 acre dock in June 1889, with the ceremonial opening and celebrations, attended by 2000 guests, taking place a month later. The ceremony was conducted by David Davies, since Lady Windsor, who should have opened the dock, was unable to attend.

Funfair

The Switchback railway began operating in 1897 on land west of the current funfair. It came from the Cardiff Exhibition of 1896. It was a wooden structure.

In the early 1900s there was a plan to build a Pavilion and Winter Garden but when that plan failed the land was leased by Sydney White and it became a funfair. It has gone through many iterations and lease ownerships, notably by the Collins family, over the years but there is still a funfair here today.

In 1924 the committee of the Barry Council of Evangelical Churches agitated to stop many activities on and around the beach, including the pleasure ground, in order to keep Sunday a day of rest and religion.

Bank Holiday Monday 1938 brought 250,000 visitors to the Island.

The largest wood-built roller coaster ever in the UK and one of the last opened at Easter 1940 and towered over the site for 33 years.

Gates

The gates and gate piers are actually protected; they are grade II Listed structures and are from what can be seen to be intact. Well, the amazing thing is that the wrought iron fences and gates are survivors of two World Wars that may have been acquired for the war effort, in both cases they survived that requisition.

The wall that supports the metal fence and external flanking plinths, are made out of local Carboniferous Limestone dressed blocks. But the tall plinths holding the gates and the structures cornice stones are all of a type of Pennant sandstone from the Valleys; a type of stone associated with mining.

The iron work has very robust finials; just as could be expected with any metal work on an estate with fencing at a Lord Windsor property. The rest of the metal work is very ornate, with a floret appeal; very let's say Georgian feel to it.

Friar's Point / Friar's Point House

The area around Barry Island shows extensive evidence of modern human occupation. Mesolithic or Middle Stone Age microlith flint tools have been found at Friars Point

The archaeology and early settlement of Barry Island begins with evidence of Bronze Age activity on Friars Point and traces of Roman occupation dating from the first century AD.

Circa 1900 remodelling of building of 1858, and subsequently remodelled. Originally built as Marine Hotel, by Francis Crawshay (Iron works at Merthyr) who bought Barry Island in 1856. Island bought 1873 by J D Traherne who enlarged house, and renamed it the Pier Hotel. Traherne's additions later demolished by Lord Windsor (who later became the Earl of Plymouth) who took over house in 1894, and renamed it Friars Point House. House remodelled circa 1900 by Sir William Graham, especially interior; in 1911 he made further improvements to grounds.

The owner, Lord Windsor himself, the very same that was the Chairman of the Barry Dock and Railways Company.

Swimming Pool

A tidal bathing pool was constructed below Friars Point. 'Bathing houses' or changing rooms were built for women above the tidal pool and for men at the Nell's Point end of the beach. Ideally, men and women bathed separately.

In 1912, the White family installed the Figure 8 on the present fairground site, prior to dismantling the Switchback Railway in 1914.

By the 1930s, women could show bare arms, but men could not show their bare chests. Donkey rides were very popular and their numbers increased. In 1897 the Council ruled that donkey-men should wear blue waistcoats, trousers and caps to be identifiable, and donkeys carry registration numbers which were displayed on their noses. Punch and Judy shows and sand sculpturing also were popular entertainments in the early days.

On August Bank Holiday Monday 1909, 30,000 came from Cardiff, the valleys and elsewhere, largely by train and there was also a huge crowd on the Tuesday.

Geology

Near the amusement arcade on the promenade at Whitmore Bay on Barry Island in South Wales (where "Gavin and Stacey" is filmed for the TV sitcom series) is a fantastic exposure of Triassic rocks. The reddish to greenish strata form a striped cliff topped by trees (holm oak, I think). The sedimentary rock layers belong to the Branscombe Mudstone Formation which is part of the Mercia Mudstone Group. The remarkably different colours of the stripes reflect the different environmental and climatic conditions prevailing when the deposits accumulated.

Whitmore Bay

Used to sand dunes.

In 1897, the Switchback Railway was opened between the beach and the site of the cricket ground (1904). It was designed by the American roller coaster engineer LaMarcus Thompson for the 1896 Cardiff Empire Exhibition and brought to Barry by Sydney White. Also in 1897, the Windsor estate created an embankment above the foreshore, between Friars Road and the beach, to hold back the dunes. In 1899, the railway was extended to the Pier Head via a tunnel, which enabled the growth of the pleasure steamer trade.

Next, between 1903 and 1905, a 'halfpenny promenade' was developed along the embankment between Paget Road and Nell's Point.

Prior to 1909 the beach was more a private affair visitors would have to pay to use it. After 1909 it was purchased by the Council.

Grade 2 listed toilets.

Built 1926. Sold for development into a restaurant?? Possibly.

Guinness Clock

It was in Battersea in May 1951 that the first Guinness Festival Clock began to entertain the public. This 'Crazy Clock' was Guinness's contribution to the Festival fun. It was the brainchild of the Guinness Advertising Manager, Martin Pick, who had trained as an engineer before he entered the world of advertising.

The Clock was designed by the firm of Lewitt Him and took five months for clockmakers Baume and Co Ltd. of Hatton Garden to construct. Standing 25 feet high, the Clock's internal mechanism was highly elaborate and included nine reversible electric motors and three synchronous clocks. No clock of comparable complexity had been made in England for 300 years.

The original Guinness Clock proved so popular that Guinness received enquiries from a number of local authorities, department stores and exhibition promoters who all wanted to borrow it for display. This inspired the building of slightly smaller 'travelling versions' of the clock, the first two of which were ready by September 1952.

In all eight travelling Guinness Clocks and one miniature (5ft high) version were constructed, and they were seen at many other places including Paignton, Barry Island, Great Yarmouth, Folkestone, South Shields, Leamington Spa, the Isle of Sheppey, Chester, Warrington, Brighton, New Brighton, Southsea and Bristol.

The Guinness clock was a noteworthy feature of Barry Island from 1955 to 1966. had to wait for hour to see the pelican. the top started to spin up like an umbrella. Featured the animals in the adverts: toucan, ostrich, pelican etc.

<http://www.bigginhill-history.co.uk/guinness/time/history.htm#The%20routine>

Holiday Camp

There used to be a public golf course at the top. Butlins Barry Island was a holiday camp that opened 1966 and closed in 1996, by which time it had been known as The Barry Island Resort for about nine years.

Although Barry Island used to be home to a Butlins Holiday Camp, it is now known more for its beach and Barry Island Pleasure Park.

Building started in 1965. It was Billy Butlin's last and smallest camp, and it is said that he always wanted to build a camp here because he had such awful memories of being on holiday in Barry Island as youth.

He stayed in a guest house and the landlady insisted that the guests left her house after breakfast and did not come back until it was time for the evening meal, no matter the weather. He was bored and wet for most of the holiday.

The camp opened to guests on 18 June 1966. It had restaurants, a dance hall, swimming pools, a cinema, redcoats and all the usual facilities of a mid-20th century British holiday camp. It was popular and brought custom to the Island and town but by the 1970s cheaper holidays to Spain and other places on the Mediterranean were drawing punters away. The last guests of Butlins left on 27th December 1986 after their Christmas bookings were honoured and Butlins closed 4 days later. Majestic Holidays took over the site and their first guests arrived on 23 May 1987.

Nell's Point

Untruth: Named after Nell who told them not to build the lifeboat station that. That was the point she made. Hence Nell's Point.

People

The BBC television series Gavin & Stacey is partly set and filmed in Barry, set in Barry and Billericay, Essex. 3 series 2007-10. Created and starring Ruth Jones, James Corden (Late Late Show in USA till 2023) 2024–present: The Constituent – political drama at the Old Vic. , Rob Brydon. The surnames of characters are of well-known English serial killers were used for some of the main characters – Harold Shipman, Fred West and Peter Sutcliffe.

Smugglers

Smuggling was an endemic problem along the Glamorgan coastline and a constant headache for the port authorities of the Bristol Channel, especially during the eighteenth century. Criminal gangs sought to profit by smuggling in contraband from the Continent and avoiding the high tax imposed by the Government. Alcohol and tobacco were the most smuggled contraband but the smugglers would attempt to conceal anything which turned a profit.

Perhaps the most notorious and well known of the smugglers of Barry Island was Thomas Knight. Infamous in his day, Thomas Knight for a period of time resided on Barry Island and was often surrounded by a large gang of 60-70 armed men. This made the job of the officials of the port at Barry all the more difficult.

Knight also kept a large ship off Barry Island which he used for smuggling. 1784 seems to have been a busy year for Knight. On April 17 of that year, it was reported that an armed vessel with 24 guns and a crew of 53 was running what was by all accounts a very open smuggling operation off Barry Island with Knight having little or no fear of the authorities—it is no surprise that the people of the area 'were in such dread of Knight and his gang.'

Knight was eventually dislodged and moved his smuggling operation to Lundy.

Smugglers: <https://www.barryanddistrictnews.co.uk/news/19954268.hidden-glamorgan-history-smugglers-barry-island/>

The National Coastwatch Institution Station

This was the first on the Welsh coast. Now there are four in Wales and forty six around the UK. It uses the old coastguard building which had been disused for nearly twenty years. It was rebuilt to a very high standard with funding from the Welsh Assembly Government as it was then known and the Vale of Glamorgan Council. The handover and opening ceremony was on 16th February 2007 and the first watch was on Saturday the 17th of February 2007. It is operated by volunteers on a rota.

Searchlight Emplacement at Nells Point

The concrete structures here are the remains of a World War Two Coast Artillery Searchlight emplacement, one of three designed to direct the guns of Barry Fort which protected the entrance to Barry docks. The searchlight swept a beam of light horizontally across the channel at night to illuminate any ship or submarine. If an enemy vessel was identified the searchlight would enable the guns of Barry Fort to obtain the correct bearing and range of the target.

Jackson's Bay

Jacksons Bay lies between Nells point and the western breakwater. It was once called Breakwater Cove and is named after Sir John Jackson who built the harbour between the breakwater and the dock entrance.

It was favoured by many local people in the past rather than Whitmore Bay which was the province of the trippers and more crowded. Apparently, it was good for swimming but there was foul, horrible mud underfoot they say. The cliffs show the various layers of the sedimentary rocks displayed of the Triassic period in this area and there is an obvious fault to see in the small outcrop of the cliff.

Barry Lifeboat Station

This was situated in the outer harbour within the breakwater. The station and slipway were built at a cost of £2300 and opened by the RNLI in 1901. The first motor boat the motorised Wesley class Prince David built for £8019 was placed on service in 1922.

A more modern lifeboat was funded by Richard Colton from Northampton. It was mainly funded by the legacy of the late Mr Richard Colton who left two classic Ferrari cars to the RLNI in his will. They raised a total of £8.5m at auction in 2015 which has been used to fund another Shannon class lifeboat, major equipment and contributions to new boat houses around the UK.

St Baruc's Chapel

St Baruc was a follower and student of St Cadoc of Llancarfan and according to legend, Cadoc and other religious men went on a retreat to Flat Holm / Ynys Echni. When they returned, Cadoc realised that they

had left his religious handbook or manual, his Enchiridion behind. (Enchiridion is probably a Greek word not Welsh as it would sound if "ch" is pronounced fel yn y Gymraeg!)

Cadoc sent Baruc and Gweldes back to Flat Holm to retrieve it. When they were returning their boat capsized and they were drowned. Gweldes' body washed up on Ynys

Echni and Baruc's body was washed up on Barry Island and he was buried here in about 700 AD.

Ruins of the chapel

This tragedy did not seem to have upset Cadoc too much as he sent his men out fishing for his supper. They caught or found a gigantic salmon which, when opened up, was found to contain the book completely undamaged. A miracle ! Baruc became a saint and his grave a place of pilgrimage. It is said that 4 pilgrimages to Barry Island were equal to one to Rome.

Although the Roman occupation left no physical impression on Barry Island, there were Romano-British settlements nearby in Barry and Llandough. These people embraced the Roman religion of Christianity and dedicated a chapel to St Baruc, a disciple of St Cadoc. Having forgotten to bring St Cadoc's reading matter with him, on a journey from the island of Flat Holm, St Baruc was sent back and he drowned in the Bristol Channel on the return journey. He was buried on Barry Island and the ruins of the chapel that was dedicated to him can still be seen in Friars Road. His feast day is on 27 September.

Initially the chapel may have been a wattle construct, but it is thought that in Norman times a stone chapel was built, probably in the early 12th century.

The Norman/Welsh chronicler Gerallt Gymro (c.1146 – c.1223) described the origin of his family name in his 'The Itinerary of Archbishop Baldwin through Wales' (also known as 'The Journey through Wales'). Gerallt Gymro, also known as French: Gerald de Barri, Latin: Giraldus Cambrensis and English: Gerald of Wales, wrote "Not far from Caerdyf (sic) is a small island situated near the shore of the Severn, called Barri, from St. Baroc, who formerly lived there, and whose remains are deposited in a chapel overgrown with ivy, having been transferred to a coffin. From hence a noble family, of the maritime parts of South Wales, who owned this island and the adjoining estates, received the name of de Barri."

The Barrys in Ireland, as well as the family of Giraldus, who were lords of it, are said to have derived their names from this island.

The surviving remains of the chapel, which probably represent a free chapel and pilgrimage site, date from the twelfth century. They are part of a complex that included a cemetery and priest's house, as well as a possible habitation site. The chapel was abandoned in the early sixteenth century and gradually covered by blown sand. A votive well, for which there is post-medieval evidence, was presumably connected with the chapel and lay 270m (885 feet) to its south. As late as 1700, it was prized for its medicinal properties.

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Prehistoric Origins

on Barry Island and near Wenvoe, and Neolithic or New Stone Age polished stone axe-heads were discovered in St. Andrews Major. As the area was heavily wooded and movement would have been restricted, it is likely that people also came to what was to become Wales by boat, apparently from the Iberian Peninsula. They cleared the forests to establish pasture and to cultivate the land. These neolithic colonists, who integrated with the indigenous people, gradually changed from being hunter-gatherers to settled farmers. They built the long barrows at St Lythans and Tinkinswood, which date to around 6,000 BP, only 3 miles (4.8 km) and 4 miles (6.4 km) to the north of Barry Island, respectively.

New cultures

In common with the people living all over Great Britain, over the following centuries the local population assimilated immigrants and exchanged ideas of the Bronze Age and Iron Age Celtic cultures. Together with much of South Wales, Barry Island was settled by a Celtic British tribe called the Silures. There have been five Bronze Age burial mounds, or cairns, recorded on Friars Point.

The Vikings launched raids in the area and Barry Island was known to be a raider base in 1087.

Modern times

Rabbits were now the island's main product and sold in quantity at Bristol

Until 1896, when a rail link with the mainland via a 250 yard long pier structure was completed, the only access to Barry Island had been either on foot across the sand and mud at low tide, or when the tide was in, by Yellow Funnel Line paddle steamer. Over 150,000 visitors were recorded arriving one August Bank Holiday weekend, mostly by train. Further tourist attractions were developed on the island, and by 1934 the number of visitors to the fairground during the August Bank Holiday week was over 400,000.

British champion rollerblader and Barry native Rich Taylor died after a skating accident in a Barry street on 2 August 2004.

On 25 July 2008, Radio 1 featured Barry Island in one of their summer events, broadcasting a special edition of The Scott Mills Show live from the island as part of the show's regular "Barryoke" theme, with songs such as "Smooth Barry", a twist on the song "Smooth Criminal" by Michael Jackson with a tour of Barry Island.

Film and Barry Island

The holiday camp was used to film scenes in the "Shangri-La" holiday camp in the Doctor Who serial Delta and the Bannermen. The island was also a location for Doctor Who in the 2005 series episodes "The Empty Child" and "The Doctor Dances", standing in for a bomb site in 1941 London.

The Island also served as the setting for Pleasure Park on ITV Wales as part of the It's My Shout short film series. Part of the Island including the Pleasure Park was used in the serial The Mad Woman in the Attic, part of the third series of the Sarah Jane Adventures.

The third series of the BBC supernatural drama Being Human was set and filmed in Barry, and was aired in early 2011.

The film Submarine (2010 film) was partly filmed in Barry