

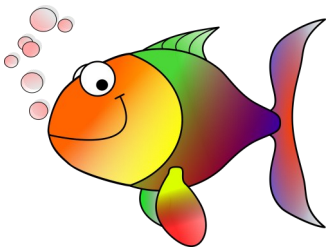
The Friends of Hilbre Newsletter



Hilbre is one of three tidal islands in the Dee Estuary. The Friends of Hilbre aim to help preserve all aspects of this Local Nature Reserve.

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Ann Cleeves: Friends of Hilbre Patron.

The Friends of Hilbre (Charity number 1103822) was formed in 2001, with the aim of preserving all aspects of this Local Nature Reserve.

In 2023, we are delighted to announce that Ann Cleeves OBE has agreed to be our patron.

Ann is an award winning crime writer. She is author of over 35 critically acclaimed novels and winner of the CWA Diamond Dagger 2107. She has created detectives Vera Stanhope, Jimmy Perez and Matthew Venn, who can be found in ITV's Vera, BBC 1's Shetland and ITV's The Long Call. She lives on Northumberland, where the Vera books are set.



Ann has strong links to Hilbre Island. On 9th January 1978, it was reported in the Liverpool Echo that 26-year old Tim Cleeves was appointed custodian of the Hibre Chain of Islands. A keen ornithologist and nature historian, he had previously worked for the RSPB on Bardsey Island. "I found the way of life even better than expected" he said.

His wife Ann (22) was taking a Social Worker's course at the University of Liverpool and soon became familiar with the 40 minute walk across to the mainland. " I get off shortly after 6 am to catch the train from West Kirby to the university on 2-3 days a week. If I cannot get back before high tide, I stay the night with friends. The island is an ideal place to study with only the birds and seals for company" she added. I

Ann also helped to operate the Coastguard radio and to collect driftwood to supplement their fuel stocks.

The Liverpool Echo reported that both Tim and Ann had fallen in love with their island home, which is cut off for 12 hours each day by the tide.

Ann went on to spend the first 4 years of her married life living on Hilbre. She once said "it's a wild, wonderful lonely location - the perfect place for a murder."

Ann Cleeves, continued

<https://www.anncleeves.com>

Dave Gregson (Chair of the Friends of Hilbre) says:

The Friends of Hilbre have been in existence for over 22 years and are custodians of the islands, just as Ann's husband was all those years ago. It is important to us that, as we are moving into another phase of development of the Charity, we need to raise our profile. With Ann's link to the Island, we thought that she would be the perfect person to become our Patron. Hilbre is a unique place, it is an important nature reserve, with historic buildings and a living history. There are many people who have been involved with the islands in one form or another for many years, some of whom Ann knows. We were delighted when Ann accepted our invitation, we look forward to having her support in the years ahead.



Ann Cleeves says:

I spent 4 happy years on the Island with my husband. I wrote a chapter there for 'Hilbre: The Cheshire Island', edited by Prof. J Craggs and published by Liverpool University Press. This was my first published writing. Our daughter spent her first 6 months in Telegraph House. It was lovely to visit last month, and I hope it is not too long before I'm there again.



Member's Day Blog 2023:

'Throughout the month, the island grew more beautiful, with a succession of wild flowers. First there was the Bluebells which cover Middle Eye and the south end of Hilbre, woodland flowers were uncharacteristic in an island habitat, yet so attractive, and then the pink of the Thrift and gold of the Bird's Foot Trefoil.

When Ann Cleeves wrote the above passage taken from the book "Hilbre The Cheshire Island" she never would have dreamed that one day she would become an internationally famous crime writer and that our Members Day would be dedicated to announce her as our patron.

We could not have chosen a better day weather wise and the walk out to Hilbre was a delightful as usual. Members were met on the slipway by Marko and Andy from Transition Town West Kirby serenading us as we arrived. The frantic dash to get to the island before it was engulfed by the tide was soon forgotten as we melted into the atmosphere of the day.

After a quick cuppa the activities began. Members were taken around the Heliogoland traps by John and Andrea from the bird observatory. This was supplemented with visit to the HIBO cottage where a talk was given by Gavin Broad an expert on wasps and moths. By now Nigel from the canoe club had arrived and members were able to visit and take in the nostalgic ambience of this historic club.

Before the BBQ lunch Andy Johnson, a Liverpool story teller, was able to take us back to a bygone age with his story of 'The Ladies Cave'. Just close your eyes and you were back in the time of sailing ships and heartache as adjectives dripped from his tongue.

Tony and Kate did a fantastic job on the BBQ and we were joined by members of the bird observatory including founder member Mr A Bell. Burgers and sausages taste even nicer on a hot cloudless Hilbre Day with Andy and Marko adding musical accompaniment.

A further story from Andy Johnson was soon followed by Sue McMillan's feedback on her research about her great grandfather James Askew who was the telegraph master on the island.

As the tide retreated we all gathered at the Buoy Master's Store for a singalong led by Transition Town West Kirby. A great end to a perfect day on Hilbre Island that we hope will live long in people's memories.

Thankyou to all those who came and took part on this day.

David Gregson

Developing an Inclusive Access Approach to Hilbre:

We have been exploring how we could provide support people who might not otherwise be able to get out to Hilbre Island. With this in view, on the Open Day in May, we looked at what considerations could be taken into account for people with a visual disability. Sue met with two willing volunteers, Dawn (no sight) and Alan (limited sight). They filmed most of the walk and are happy for FoH to use this recording. The weather was warm and sunny, the sand was mainly dry and the rocks were not slippery. They were able to negotiate the route across without making any backtracking, or diversions.

Dawn and Alan enjoyed the day and have provided some useful feedback.

- ⇒ A sighted guide is essential for anyone with limited sight to safely access Hilbre.
- ⇒ People visiting Hilbre need a good level of mobility and general fitness.
- ⇒ An Open Day is a good option (or similar organised event, because there are talks and people who can share information about Hilbre.
- ⇒ Some positive sensory elements included feeling the sandstone cliff faces, the crushed shells in the sand, the round glass windows in the Telegraph Station, with the telescope holes, the wooden structures in the lifeboat station, the sounds of the birds and seals etc.

We would also like to help to facilitate people with other disabilities in gaining access. We recognise that we do not have the expertise and knowledge (in medical and physical conditions) for us to be able to take the responsibility to lead people with a disability safely out to Hilbre. We would advise that a friend, or someone with practical experience took the responsibility of being the guide, but we could add our knowledge of the experience of Hilbre, to help to anticipate any potential problems.

We are exploring ways of facilitating this; for example the video of Dawn and Alan's walk could be viewed by a trusted guide who wanted to help friends / clients with limited sight, to help them to plan a walk to Hilbre. We have also looked at the possibility of providing a recorded guide, or written guide, to help people to plan a safer experience.

If anyone would like to be involved in this, please contact Dave Gregson.

Contributions for Newsletter?



Do you have any memories, or stories about Hilbre Island? Do you have a favourite picture of the Islands? We would love to hear from you.

Please send your contributions for the newsletter to:

The Editor FoH Newsletter,
26 Woodside Road , Irby. CH61 4UL.

Or e-mail to nickynor16@sky.com (Please name file 'FoH Article')

The Mystery of Hilbre Island:

The sun tries to break through the clouds as I follow the smell of the sea along the sand and think about where I am going. West Kirby beach is huge, it looks like a blanket of warm sand and my trainers squelch across it, my walking stick leaving a trail of holes in its wake. The drive with Matt the Ranger, across to the actual islands is so rocky and bumpy, I almost feel the nerves accelerate to a thousand miles an hour. I am not sure why I am so nervous, I am not going out on my own- it's a trip with uni. There is nothing to be nervous about, but I'm always like this going somewhere unusual.

When the car does stop and my stomach jolts., I get a strange feeling, maybe the fact that my sight loss does not do me any favours. But this strange feeling is overwhelming, there is a strange smell in the air too, and grass and its very hilly. When we start walking around the island as a group, I am unsure of where to put my feet, so me and my stick just follow. Slowly the strange feeling goes away over the course of the morning. It turns to excitement when Matt mentions that fellow crime writer Anne Cleeves used to live here and that her husband Tim was the Ranger.

I can see where Anne got the inspiration for the Shetland Islands. The Shetland Islands are cut off from the mainland and you can only reach it by boat, both in the books and the television adaptations. That realisation just clicked, like a light had been switched back on. It was then that I saw Hilbre for what it is. It may look like a weird shape in the middle of the sea, but its much more than that. It had an isolated, desolate bleak feeling as I walked around. I could feel it and that feeling stayed with me since I've left there, it reminded me of the house in the ghost novel by Susan Hill. It had that same eerie, but beautiful feeling the Eel Marsh had.

Because I forgot to take some photos, I have had to rely on what I can vividly remember. I do remember what it felt like as a place. And I can see why Ann Cleave started her first novels here, because it does have a peculiar but very strong sense of place. What I mean is that you can tell how isolated it is, how cut off it is by not having electricity and running water. I'm not sure what it would be like to live on, and I'm not sure I would have the toughness to cope with living there. But I did get an amazing feeling of, what a place. I would definitely go again, and this time, take photos.

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(an abridged extract 'The Island'. This collection of written pieces was created by LIMU post grad students, in response to their fieldtrip to Hilbre in 2022. We will be including further extracts in future newsletters)



Advanced notice of AGM:

On Monday 4th Sept

At 6:45 for a 7:00 Start

In the United Reformed Church, West Kirby

Meols Drive. CH48 5DA

