

Victoria County History of Cumbria Project. Draft parish/township histories

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Parish/township: WALNEY ISLAND

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WALNEY ISLAND

Walney Island (hereinafter called Walney), was a subdivision of Hawcoat, itself a Brierley¹ of the Parish of Dalton in the south west of the Furness peninsula, in North Lonsdale hundred, Lancashire. It became part of Barrow-in-Furness County Borough on 18th July 1872 on the passing of the Barrow-in-Furness Corporation Extension and Amendment Act.² A true island until the opening of Walney bridge in 1908, it is approximately 10 miles long and no more than a mile wide at its widest point, covering an area of 3065 a. and being no more than 21 m. above sea level.³ It is surrounded on one side by the Irish Sea and the other by Walney Channel, with a maximum tidal range of up to 10 metres. The name of the island has changed over time: Hougenai in 1086;⁴ Wagneia in the 1127 Charter from the founding of Furness Abbey;⁵ Wagenay in 1403.⁶ Hougen-ai means the island belonging to Hougun – the name

¹ A quarter sub-division. The other three for Dalton were Lindal, Marton and Askam.

² Barrow & District Local Board Blue Book, Oct 1887.

³ Topographical map <https://en-gb.topographic-map.com/maps/94cj/isle-of-walney>

⁴ N. Whalley, 'The Domesday Book of South Cumbria', *CW3*, 18 (2018), pp.105–122.

⁵ T. Beck, *Annales Furnesienses: The History and Antiquities of the Abbey of Furness* (1844), p.112.

⁶ Beck, *Annales Furnesienses*, p.281.

given to Furness in the Domesday survey. Both Wagneia and Wagenay are thought to be derived from Old Norse and various explanations have been suggested including ‘The Island of the wagon’ and ‘The island of quick sands.’

LANDSCAPE, SETTLEMENT AND BUILDINGS

Landscape

Walney is characterised by dune systems at both its north and south ends, as well as low lying salt marshes, grassland and low glacial drumlins. The main areas of settlement lie in the central part of the island between the northern village of North Scale and the southern village of Biggar. To the North is the Duddon Estuary, to the east Walney Channel, to the south the islands of Roa and Piel before the expanse of Morecambe Bay, and to the West is the Irish Sea.

Walney has always been at the mercy of the sea, especially on its west side. Dr Close, in his 1813 edition of Thomas West’s *Antiquities of Furness*, and Thomas Alcock Beck, in his *Annales Furnesienses* of 1844, both bemoan the fact that the sea is winning the battle. A number of articles appear in Barrow Naturalists Field Club and Photographic Society proceedings describing the diminishing width of the island over time. One of these includes a map showing changes between 1737 and 1951, and the substantial loss of land that had occurred.⁷ Another article notes a piece of land 20 feet in width near Lamity Sike Pit had been washed away between 1879 and 1882, and then another 73 feet between 1889 and 1906.⁸ A map showing the changes between 1797 and 1965 shows a depletion of the width of

⁷ James Melville, ‘How long will Walney remain one island’, *Barrow Naturalists Field Club Proceedings*, 8, New Series (1956), p.25-34.

⁸ W.B. Kendall, another local historian, wrote ‘Waste of coast line Furness and Walney in 1000 years’: *Barrow Naturalists Field Club Annual Reports*, 18 (1906), pp.75-84.

the island coupled with an extension of the length at the south end due to accretion.⁹ The effects of climate change can only hasten this process. Since 2013 the road between Earnse Bay and the North End sandhills has completely been washed away. In March 2023 part of the wall alongside this beach has been undermined and fallen over following a high spring tide.

From the late 19th century, Walney's beaches attracted day trippers from Barrow. In the west of the island is the 18-hole golf course belonging to Furness Golf Club (fd. 1872)¹⁰ and an airfield, built on the site of North End Farm during the Second World War.¹¹

Communications

Roads

Until the building of Vickerstown (1900-1904), the road system on the island was rudimentary. There were the fords across to the mainland and Barrow Island, and there was a system of lanes between the fields both north and south. There was a lane between Biggar village and the South End which went via the west side of the island until it was eroded away, and there were lanes between Biggar village and the ferry crossing. Cows Tarn Lane ran from North Scale to Earnse Bay and Mill Lane from North Scale towards Moor Tarn, it joined Sandy Gap Lane and continued to the west side. Chapel Lane ran from St Mary's to Tummerhill. Thorny Nook Lane connected Biggar village to Biggar High Bank and Rakes Lane and Mawflat Lane connected Biggar village to the south.¹² So, although it was possible to get from North to South and from the East side to the West side of the island, the roads

⁹ Ada W. Phillips and W. Rollinson, *Coastal changes on Walney Island North Lancashire* (Department of geography University of Liverpool, 1971).

¹⁰ Below, *Social Hist.*

¹¹ Below, *Communications.*

¹² OS maps, Sheet XXI (1847 to 1873 edns).

bore little resemblance to those that exist in 2023. In 1893 the council bought land from the various owners on the route of the lane which ran from the old school on the Promenade to Biggar Bank in order to widen the same.¹³ This eventually became Ocean Road. The road system really emerged as the various housing estates were built during the 20th Century.

Walney Bridge

Being an island with the relevant tidal restrictions on access there were a total of eight fords and roads across the channel to Barrow Island and Piel before 1847.¹⁴ An Act of Parliament in 1863 gave Furness Railway Company powers to construct a harbour, docks and other works and to deepen Walney Channel.¹⁵ In deepening the channel, the company made many of the fords impassable. On 4th November 1875, the inhabitants of Walney gave notice to the Furness Railway Company, that if the company did not forthwith make arrangements to restore the ancient communications, they would take legal action to enforce their rights. The result was that in April 1877, an agreement was entered into by the owners and lessees of lands at Biggar and South End and the Furness Railway Company, with the Company agreeing to construct a steam ferry between Barrow Island and Walney, and to complete the same within nine months. An Act of Parliament of 1879 authorised the Company to continue and maintain a ferry.¹⁶ The ferry began running on 30th June 1878 and ran from 5.00am until midnight.

¹³ CAS (Barrow), BA/C Box 4; *Road Improvements Walney*

¹⁴ H. Gaythorpe, 'The Walney Fords', *Barrow Naturalists Field Club Annual Report*, 17 (1903/4), p.118.

¹⁵ Furness Railway and Barrow Harbour Act 1863; [Legislation.gov.uk](https://www.legislation.gov.uk) (accessed 4th April 2023).

¹⁶ Furness Railway Act 1879; [Furness Railway Act 1879 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk) (accessed 4th April 2023).

By 1888 the ‘Walneyites’¹⁷ were demanding a bridge and Barrow Council voted to obtain powers from Parliament to construct such a bridge, (without agreeing to spend the necessary funds), in November of that year.¹⁸ The project was then abandoned. However, once Vickerstown had been built between 1900 and 1904 there had been a huge rise in the population of Walney and the demand for a bridge was even greater. There were different views in the town with the main protagonists being Furness Railway who were against a bridge and Vickers Sons & Maxims Ltd who were for it. A newspaper was set up whose main purpose was to promote the bridge – *The Vickerstown Chronicle* – which published between October 1902 and November 1904. A vote was held in the town in Jan 1904, the result being in favour by 4,013 to 2,178.¹⁹ There was a torchlight procession to James Dunn Park in celebration led by the shipyard band and with fireworks and balloons. A wooden model of the ferry was burnt.²⁰

Construction began in mid-1905. Originally it was hoped that the King and Queen could open the bridge but this was cancelled and the bridge was opened by the Mayoress, Mrs T.F. Taylor, on 30th July 1908.²¹ It was completed in the Autumn of the same year. It was a toll bridge with the toll set at $\frac{1}{2}d.$ per person plus an extra $1d.$ per person if on a tram. In the first week of operation 80,556 people crossed the bridge and these figures were reported weekly in the local press.²² The toll was removed in a renaming ceremony performed by the late

¹⁷ An early reference to ‘Walneyites’ appears in the Barrow Herald of 19 April 1876 when referring to a rowing challenge.

¹⁸ *Barrow Herald and Furness Advertiser*, 27 Nov. 1888.

¹⁹ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 25 Jan. 1904.

²⁰ *Soulby’s Ulverston Advertiser and General Intelligencer*, 28 Jan. 1904.

²¹ *Barrow Herald and Furness Advertiser*, 30 Jul. 1908.

²² *Soulby’s Ulverston Advertiser and General Intelligencer*, 13 Aug. 1908.

Queen Mother on 4th April 1935. From then onwards the bridge would be named Jubilee bridge.²³ It remains the sole access road to the island.

Trams

After Walney Bridge opened it was not until June 1909 that the tram lines reached the Promenade on Walney.²⁴ Agreement between the council and The British Electric Traction Company in 1911 led to the tram system being extended from the Promenade to Biggar Bank;²⁵ this opened on 4th August 1911.²⁶ No further tram lines were laid to other parts of the island.

Lighthouse

In 1789, the Commissioners of the Port of Lancaster got an Act of Parliament for improving the Navigation of the River Lune and various other matters.²⁷ Among these were the erection of lighthouses in such parts of Lancaster Bay as they might think most proper. They thought that the South East end of Walney or Hawse Point was the best site due to the number of wrecks occurring on the west side of the island.²⁸ The lighthouse was built with sandstone from Overton and was first used on 1st December 1790. The lanthorn (lantern) and reflectors were destroyed in a fire on 21st December 1803 but the light was up and running again by March 1804. The lighthouse cost £1000 to erect. It stands on a tapered octagonal column 70 feet high, formed of dressed, painted stone. It features slit windows, with an iron balcony that

²³ *Lancashire Evening Post*, 4th Apr. 1935.

²⁴ [Barrow-in-Furness Tramways Co Ltd 1885-1920 - Local Transport History](#) [accessed 24th May 2023].

²⁵ CAS (Barrow), BA/C Box 10.

²⁶ CAS (Barrow), BLC/P/281/GT/TRA1, dated photograph.

²⁷ 29 Geo iii C12.

²⁸ CAS (Barrow), Z/274/1, extract from the Walney lighthouse visitors book No.1, transcribed.

encompassed the fully-glazed lantern housing. The latter has a hipped roof with finial.²⁹ The light had an initial rating of 3,500 candle-power and was lit by oil.³⁰ In 1846 the light was changed to revolve every four minutes showing a bright light every minute and in 1909 the light was converted to run on Acetylene gas. During WWII the lighthouse had a telephone at the top and would receive coded messages telling them when to light and when to douse the light so as to guide convoys down the Irish sea.³¹ In 1953 the lighthouse was converted to electricity supplied by a diesel generator. The light thereafter flashed every 15 seconds and was visible for up to 18 miles, at 450,000 candlepower.

Postal Services and Telecommunications

A telephone exchange opened on Walney in about 1960.³² It was a Strowger electro-mechanical step-by-step system which remained in operation until it was replaced, in the same building on Church Lane, by a modern digital AXE10 system which opened on 21st July 1989.³³ The exchange was enabled for ADSL in January 2004 and is in 2023 able to provide fibre to the cabinet and, in some areas, fibre to the premises. It hosts four different providers including BT.

A number of sub post offices existed on Walney until fairly recent times. The North Scale PO closed in the mid-1990s, Douglas Street PO closed in the early 2000s, Mill Lane PO closed in

²⁹ NHLE, no. 1218858, Walney Lighthouse with two attached cottages and outbuildings (accessed 29 Jan. 2024).

³⁰ CAS (Barrow), BAMH/1/14, JL Hobbs, Walney lighthouse notes.

³¹ Interview with the only female principal lighthouse keeper, Peggy Braithwaite, 1993: [Peg Braithwaite, Lady Lighthouse Keeper. 1993 - YouTube](#) (accessed 3rd April 2023).

³² It is not on the 1959 OS map, which was surveyed in 1957 but is on a 1964 aerial photograph: CAS (Barrow), LC280_CX_WAL3.

³³ The author of this article was the Clerk of Works for the exchange on Walney responsible for the building, commissioning, testing and opening of the new BT exchange.

2020, and Mikasa Street PO closed in the early 2000s. The only remaining PO services on the island today are as an add-on to the Co-operative store on Amphitrite Street.

Settlement and Buildings

Walney was effectively divided into four settlements or townships in the Middle Ages. North End, which as its name suggests, was at the northernmost part of the island and ran from the sandhills to North Scale. In 2023 that would be from the northern tip of the island to part way down the current airfield. There were four tenements there. Until the building of the airfield, in 1940, there was a farm at Northend and a windmill once stood there. Below North End, North Scale township ran south to Tummerhill – approximately to Ocean Road today. Biggar township ran from Tummerhill south to approximately where South End farm stands in 2023. Before the Reformation, Furness Abbey had 16 tenements there.³⁴ South End ran from there to the southern tip of the island.

South End township had a number of farms at one time, which have been lost to the sea. It originally consisted of eight tenements. Only one –South-End farm – remains and has been rebuilt at least once.³⁵ One of the earliest buildings on the island after the villages of North Scale and Biggar, was the lighthouse at the South End, which was completed in 1790, and had two adjoining cottages.³⁶

North Scale and Biggar, along with the outlying tenements of North End and South End continued to be the main dwelling places of the island until the end of the 19th century.³⁷ The

³⁴ Below, Economic Hist: Agriculture.

³⁵ There are at least four different datestones built into the current building -1641, 1691, 1757 and 1764

³⁶ Above: Communications.

³⁷ Census 1841-1891.

spectacular rise of the town of Barrow led to a chronic shortage of housing in the borough and led to a few short-term solutions. The 40 huts on Barrow Island, built by the shipyard for its workers, were declared unsanitary and were demolished in the early 1880s.³⁸ The ex-liner, *Alaska*, was used for about 18 months by Vickers, Sons & Maxims Ltd as temporary accommodation for about 250 workmen.³⁹ It was against this background that the Isle of Walney Estates Company was formed in 1899 with a plan to develop Walney Island into a seaside resort with up to 1,000 houses.⁴⁰ By 1900 the company was owned by Vickers and they had purchased 343 a. at a cost of £100 per acre.⁴¹ The original plans drawn up were for a village on the east side of the island, north of the Ferry Hotel. It was to be called Vickersdale and comprised of a collection of small terraces and a large central square. The seaside resort idea was gone.⁴²

By 1904 about 950 houses had been built north and south of the Ferry on an estate called Vickerstown, the name Vickersdale having been dropped before any houses were built. The houses were solid, well built and all with flush toilets, running water and electricity. The estate was run from the offices of the Isle of Walney Estates Company next to The Ferry Hotel. The company also established a farm near North Scale.⁴³ A nursery and small market garden was built near Avon Street. Part of the layout of Vickerstown included a park, which remains at the centre of the island today: James Dunn Park opened in June 1903.⁴⁴

The next major housing scheme on the Island was not until the 1930s when the Ocean Road estate, including Strathnaver, Strathaird and Strathmore, was built. This was closely followed

³⁸ The Medical Officer of Health in 1884 reported that 344 huts had been demolished.

³⁹ *Soulby's Ulverston Advertiser and General Intelligencer*, 06 Jul. 1899.

⁴⁰ *Glossop-dale Chronicle and North Derbyshire Reporter*, 10 May 1899.

⁴¹ *Town Planning report; The Herald*, 22 Jul. 1911.

⁴² CAS (Barrow), Z/312, tracing of projected scheme on Walney, 1899.

⁴³ *The Advertiser*, 11 Jun. 1903.

⁴⁴ *Lancashire Evening Post*, 1 Jun. 1903.

by Southport Drive, Maryport Drive, Black Butts Lane etc.⁴⁵ These are typical inter-War semi-detached houses built by private contractors. Social housing estates were built at Rainey Park and Tummerhill in the 1950s,⁴⁶ and West Shore in the mid-1960s. Shearwater Crescent and others were also built in the 1960s. Carr Lane estate, near Biggar Bank, was built in the 1980s⁴⁷

Elsewhere on the island, the Red Ley estate was built between North Scale and the airfield during the 1960s, and in the early 1970s Lowther Crescent, Muncaster Road and others were added to the housing stock in what had been a quiet village.⁴⁸ There has been a residential caravan park at Earnse Bay (West Shore Park) since the mid 20th century.⁴⁹ It is for persons aged over 50.⁵⁰ In 2023, the vast majority of housing or indeed building of any sort, is in the centre of the island.

Public Services and Infrastructure

Coastguard

Two plots of land were leased to HM Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty in July 1903 for Coastguard cottages and a lookout hut at the south end of Walney.⁵¹ By 1905 the three cottages and lookout with semaphore was in place.⁵² The station was in operation for many years until the local press reported that it was to close down in 1950.⁵³ In 1953 the lookout

⁴⁵ Bryn Trescaheric, *Walney, A Wall in the Sea* (Hougenai Press, 1984).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Bryn Trescaheric, *How Barrow was Built* (Hougenai Press, 1985).

⁴⁸ Trescaheric, *Wall in the Sea*.

⁴⁹ *The Daily Herald*, Advert 1960.

⁵⁰ <https://berkeleyparks.co.uk/park-category/north-west/west-shore/> (accessed 28 Jan. 2023).

⁵¹ CAS (Barrow), BD/BUC/43/8/20.

⁵² *Millom Gazette*, 27 Oct. 1905.

⁵³ *Evening Mail*, 31st Jan. 1950.

post was gutted in a fire.⁵⁴ A temporary post was up and running within days.⁵⁵ It was to close again in 1955.⁵⁶ By 1971 Walney had one full time coastguard and a two-day per week volunteer lookout watch based in the previously mentioned lookout tower on the west side in the centre of the island on the golf course. In the 1990s this closed and the auxiliary coastguard moved to the mainland.⁵⁷

Police

After the establishment of a Barrow Borough Police force on 1st August 1881,⁵⁸ a police station had been built around 1882 on the Promenade at Walney. Originally it had only one constable, but following the building of Vickerstown this was increased to six officers by 1906. It ceased to be a police station after the Second World War.⁵⁹

Fire brigade

As part of the building of Vickerstown, a Fire Station was built on Knox Street in 1902 and run by the Isle of Walney Estates Company. In 1904 the Barrow council agreed that a permanent fire station was required on Walney.⁶⁰ In 1906 the Estates Company informed the council that they were no longer desirous of running a private fire brigade on Walney.⁶¹ In 1907 the Company offered to let the brigade station and land for a period of five years for 1s. per year;⁶² the offer was accepted in March the same year.⁶³ In December 1914, The Isle of

⁵⁴ *Evening Mail*, 1 May 1953.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 9 May 1953.

⁵⁶ *Fleetwood Chronicle*, 15 Jul. 1955.

⁵⁷ The author of this article was a volunteer coastguard for a couple of years in the early 1980s, based at this tower.

⁵⁸ CAS (Barrow), BDX 396/3/9.

⁵⁹ *Evening Mail*, 17 Jun. 1978.

⁶⁰ CAS (Barrow), Barrow Council Watch Committee minutes, 15 Jul. 1904.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 16 Nov. 1906.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 15 Feb. 1907.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 15 Mar. 1907.

Walney Estates Company repossessed the Vickerstown Fire Station and its appliances were moved to Central Fire Station at Barrow.⁶⁴ A modern fire station was opened in Mill Lane in 1974 and at that time had a day-crewed system. In 1991 it went to an On-call system.⁶⁵ The station was under threat in 2015 before being reprieved in February 2016.⁶⁶

Military Infrastructure

Fort Walney

In 1903 the War Office announced plans to build fortifications on Walney⁶⁷ and construction began in 1909. Completed in 1911, the battery consisted of two 6-inch guns manned by two companies of Royal Garrison Artillery.⁶⁸ There were two blockhouses, a magazine, a shelter and auxiliary buildings. In January 1915 the German submarine U21 fired upon the airship shed. The battery at Walney fort returned fire and the submarine disappeared under the water.⁶⁹ The battery operated up until 1943.⁷⁰ After the Second World War, the Battery Observation Post (tower), became the Coastguard lookout tower, a use which continued until the 1990s. It is currently being converted to a house. In the immediate vicinity of the tower is an underground Royal Observer Corps post – now defunct. The other buildings had been demolished by 1973. The fortifications sat in the centre of what is now the course of Furness Golf Club.

⁶⁴ CAS (Barrow), BDFB/49/55, Fire Superintendents' report 10 Dec. 1914.

⁶⁵ Cumbria Fire & Rescue service; [Walney Fire Station | Cumbria Fire & Rescue Service](#) (accessed 30 Apr. 2023).

⁶⁶ Fire Brigades Union web site; [Cumbria council in u-turn as five fire stations saved from axe | Fire Brigades Union \(fbu.org.uk\)](#) (accessed 13 Apr. 2023).

⁶⁷ *Manchester Courier*, 21 Sept. 1909.

⁶⁸ *The Herald*, July 29 1911.

⁶⁹ Illustrated Police News, 16 Jan. 1919.

⁷⁰ https://www.recordingmorecambabay.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/H2H_0552.pdf (28 Jan. 2024).

Airfield

In October 1938, Barrow council made an order to Compulsorily purchase North End farm and 634 a. in order to build an airfield.⁷¹ The purchase cost was £8,030. A public enquiry was held in February 1939⁷² and construction began in 1940. In October 1941 the Air Gunnery School was opened and remained in operation until May 1946.⁷³ In August 1946 the unused RAF huts had all been occupied by squatters, with 150 families in residence.⁷⁴ The airfield itself was used only by glider fliers in September 1946.⁷⁵ The future of the airfield was discussed with the Aviation Ministry in 1949 with a view to Barrow Corporation using the aerodrome as a civil airport. The Ministry stated that there was no prospect of scheduled services using the aerodrome.⁷⁶ By 1952 the airfield was to be closed down by the council.⁷⁷ Despite being completely run down, the airfield was still in partial use in 1954 when the Furness Aero Club had 45 members but no planes. They shared facilities with the Blackpool and Fylde Aero Club.⁷⁸ Lakes Gliding Club started operating from the site in 1961. In 1968 Vickers took over the airport, they allowed the Lakes Gliding Club to continue to operate from the site. A number of other operators have attempted to run commercial flights, including Air Ecosse (1982-3), Air Furness (1984) and Telair (1991-2) – all went out of business.⁷⁹ In February 2023, BAE, the current airfield owners, gave Lakes Gliding Club notice to quit.⁸⁰ BAE systems own the site today and operate a number of planes from there for their own use.

⁷¹ *Lancashire Evening Post*, 5 Oct. 1938.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 16 Feb. 1939.

⁷³ 'Industrial History of Cumbria: a History of Walney Airfield': [A history of Walney Airfield | Industrial History of Cumbria \(cumbria-industries.org.uk\)](https://www.cumbria-industries.org.uk) (accessed 7 Apr. 2023).

⁷⁴ *Lancashire Evening Post*, 16 Aug. 1946.

⁷⁵ 'Only Glider Fliers use derelict 'Drome'; *Evening Mail*, 27 Sept. 1946.

⁷⁶ 'No future for Walney Aerodrome?', *ibid.*, 15 Nov. 1949.

⁷⁷ 'Walney Airport to be closed as soon as practicable', *ibid.*, 5 Mar. 1952.

⁷⁸ *Evening Mail*; 29 Nov. 1954.

⁷⁹ Industrial History of Cumbria; A history of Walney Airfield. [A history of Walney Airfield | Industrial History of Cumbria \(cumbria-industries.org.uk\)](https://www.cumbria-industries.org.uk) (accessed 7 Apr. 2023).

⁸⁰ *The Mail*, 3 Feb. 2023.

Population

Prior to the Reformation there were a total of 44 tenements on the island.⁸¹ According to contemporary reports, half the population of Walney – 120 souls – died from the plague in 1631.⁸² That suggests a population then of around 240 people. In 1841 the population stood at 389, but fell in the following two decades to a recorded low of 305 in 1861. It rose thereafter, from 338 in 1871 to 463 in 1881. After falling slightly to 433 in 1891, it more than doubled in the next decade to 961 by 1901. The building of the Vickerstown estate resulted in a huge increase by 1911, with 4,896 inhabitants on the island. The population more than doubled again during the next century, to 10,519 in 2021.⁸³

LANDOWNERSHIP

According to Domesday, Walney ('Hougunai') was one of the 26 vills or townships that formed the manor of Hougun, which before 1066 belonged to Earl Tostig.⁸⁴ In 1127 Stephen, earl of Boulogne granted to the Savigniac monks then based at Tulketh near Preston '...all my forest of Fudernesi (Furness) and Wagneia (Walney) with all the game that is in them and Dalton....'.⁸⁵ For the next four centuries, the abbot and convent of Furness Abbey controlled the lives of its tenants on Walney. North Scale and Biggar were mentioned in 1292 in the Coucher Book of Furness Abbey.⁸⁶

⁸¹ Below, Economic Hist: Agriculture.

⁸² CAS (Barrow), Z/2434/1, Dalton parish transcript.

⁸³ <https://www.ons.gov.uk>

⁸⁴ [Cumbrian Manorial Records - Lancashire North of the Sands: directory of baronies and superior manors \(lancaster.ac.uk\)](#) (accessed 16 Mar. 2023).

⁸⁵ Beck, *Annales Furnesienses*, p.168.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.231.

After the Dissolution in 1537, the lordship of Furness was held by the Crown and was managed by the Duchy of Lancaster.⁸⁷ Over time, the Duchy granted leases and other rights to various individuals and organizations, who became tenants or owners of specific parcels of land within the larger Furness estate. In 1564 Elizabeth I gave the tenants of Walney security of their tenements.⁸⁸ Their rents were also reduced permanently in consideration of their maintaining the dykes and banks at their own expense.

The lordship of Walney was granted to the Duke of Albemarle in around 1666.⁸⁹ The Liberty of Furness eventually descended to the Dukes of Buccleuch, and to the Dukes of Dalkeith, who continued to hold courts for the Liberty and its associated manors into the early twentieth century.⁹⁰ In December 1910, William Henry Walter Montagu Douglas Scott, 6th Duke of Buccleuch, 8th Duke of Queensberry (1831–1914) transferred his Furness estate to his eldest son, John Charles Montagu Douglas Scott, the Earl of Dalkeith, who became Lord of Furness.⁹¹

By 1900 the majority of Walney Island belonged to the Furness Estate, which was owned by the Dukes of Devonshire and Buccleuch. The Estate included the villages of Biggar, North Scale, and Vickerstown, as well as the land around Walney Channel and the South End of the island. Other landowners on Walney Island in 1900 included local farmers and business owners who owned small parcels of land for agriculture or commercial purposes. The Devonshire family remained the owners of the Furness Estate until the 20th century, when

⁸⁷ By Private Act, 32 Hen. VIII, cap. 6.

⁸⁸ Thomas West, *The Antiquities of Furness* (1774), p.125.

⁸⁹ CAS (Barrow), BDHJ/182/1/1, letters patent.

⁹⁰ [Cumbrian Manorial Records - Lancashire North of the Sands: directory of baronies and superior manors \(lancaster.ac.uk\)](http://lancaster.ac.uk) (accessed 16 Mar. 2023).

⁹¹ CAS (Barrow), BDBUC/42/3/5.

much of the land was sold off due to changing economic and social conditions. In 2023 some parts of the estate remain in the family's possession, while others have been sold to various private and public entities for development or conservation purposes.

ECONOMIC HISTORY

Agriculture dominated from early times until the 19th century when several small-scale industries began to arise. These all but disappeared by the mid 20th century, with only an oyster farm operating at the present time. In 2023 the only other businesses of note are the caravan sites at either end of the island, five public houses, and a few retail premises.

Agriculture

Medieval Period

North Scale was one of the granges of Furness Abbey and is first mentioned in documents of 1247. Of the 44 tenements held of the Abbey on the island, 16 were at North Scale. The tenants shared all of the 21 fields equally, having 3 dales in each field to ensure no one farmer had better land than another. They paid their rental mainly in goods and services to the Abbey.⁹² The Abbey had four tenements at North End and 16 tenures at Biggar. Here, each tenant had a field to the north of the township, a field to the south and others here and there. They had the right to graze a cow at High Bank (now Biggar Bank), and another at Low Bank. They had the right to collect tangle or seaweed for manure or burning. They also had the right to collect whins or gorse for burning and later fencing.⁹³ South End consisted of eight tenements.

⁹² W.B. Kendall, 'Northscale: The history of a Furness Village', *Barrow Naturalists Field Club Proceedings*, xii (1898).

⁹³ CAS (Barrow), BDX/828/1/2/46/; James Melville, Biggar a walled Village, 22 Dec. 1967.

Tenants paid the whole or part of their dues to the Abbey in kind⁹⁴ and Walney was very fertile. We are told in around 1530 ‘Walney, which was then much more extensive than at present and very fertile to boot, produced grain, sheep, stricks or yearling cattle, cheese, butter, hens and geese, for culinary purposes, in the following proportions; 30 quarters of barley at 5s. per quarter; 20 qrs. of wheat at an average of 7s. 7½d.; 124 qrs. of oats averaging 2s. 6d. per quarter; 60 hogs or yearling sheep at 1s. each; 30 stricks averaging about 2s. 10d. each: it seems the brethren preferred yearlings both of the flock and herd to lamb and veal; 60 stones of cheese at 8d. the stone; 26 stones of butter at 6d.; 48 hens at 1d. a piece; and 24 geese at 2d. These places also paid £3. 7s. 8d. in money, and the tenants were bound to carry eighty cart loads of peats to the abbey for 6d. a cart load.’⁹⁵ Walney tenants got their peat from Angerton Moss near Kirkby-in-Furness. ⁹⁶

Modern Agriculture

Biggar and North Scale township fields were enclosed by 1778.⁹⁷ By the beginning of the 19th century, Walney was considered to be the ‘Granary of Furness’ due to its production of wheat, oats and barley.⁹⁸ However, in 1834 the crop failed due to wet weather.⁹⁹ Potatoes, Wheat, Barley and Oats were the main crops grown both North and South of the island. Also, Turnips and Clover. A note in 1904 states that ‘Walney Wheat is equal in quality to any in the three kingdoms.’¹⁰⁰ In 1908 a ploughing competition was started and in 1911 17 teams took

⁹⁴ Beck, *Annales Furnesienses*, p.13.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.335.

⁹⁶ H.G. Pearson, ‘Biggar and its ancient customs’, *Barrow Naturalists Field Club Proceedings*, 1, ii, 66.

⁹⁷ W. Rollinson, ‘The Rural Landscape of Low Furness’, unpublished M.A. thesis, Manchester, 1961.

⁹⁸ William Close, *An Itinerary of Furness and the Environs* (1810).

⁹⁹ W. Rollinson, *The Diary and Farm Accounts of William Fisher, a Low Furness Farmer, 1811–1859*.

¹⁰⁰ *Soulby Advertiser*, 30 Jun. 1904.

part on Riley's farm at Biggar.¹⁰¹ Rabbit warrens were at both ends of the island too and were part of each estate and were closely protected. A £3 reward was offered for information leading to the conviction of rabbit poachers at the North End in September 1869.¹⁰² There are numerous examples of prosecutions for rabbit poaching on the island in the press of the 19th century. Both North Scale and Biggar census returns for 1841 to 1861 show that the vast majority of households were fully employed in agricultural pursuits. It is not until 1871 that there is significant employment elsewhere.

With the building of Vickerstown around 1902, a farm was built near North Scale by the Isle of Walney Estates Company, to provide milk, cream, eggs and vegetables. It is no longer there. In 1938 North End farm was subject to a compulsory purchase order for the construction of the airfield.¹⁰³ Little or no crops are grown on the island in the 21st century. South End farm in partnership with one from Biggar village run a herd of 50 pure bred Shorthorn cattle and 200-300 sheep between them. Holme Bank Farm at Urswick fattens about 300 beef cattle on Walney each year and Harbarrow Farm at Stainton fattens about 50 cattle on Walney through the summer and 150 lambs through winter.¹⁰⁴

Industry

Windmills

There were two windmills on Walney, the first stood somewhere south west of North Scale and near the west side of the island. It was erected around 1558¹⁰⁵ and appears on Yates's 1786 map of Lancashire. The only surviving mention of the mill is in the name Mill Lane.

¹⁰¹ Barrow Herald, 31 Jan. 1911.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 23 Sept. 1869.

¹⁰³ *Lancashire Evening Post*, 5 Oct. 1938.

¹⁰⁴ Information from Mike Mulgrew at South End Farm, Dec. 2023.

¹⁰⁵ James Melville, 'Furnesses Windmills of Old', *Evening Mail*, 23 Jun. 1978.

The second windmill stood at North End farm, the ruins of which were demolished when the airfield was constructed in 1940 and for which photographs survive.¹⁰⁶ Both of these mills appear on a hand drawn map of the township of North Scale dated 1898.¹⁰⁷

Brick Works

When the building of Vickerstown estate began around 1900 a brickworks was built near to what was to become Dominion Street to supply the necessary bricks. The bricks were transported to the North Vickerstown estate on a large trestle bridge built across the valley of Vickerstown park. A second brickworks was built near to Vickerstown Home Farm, behind Longlands.

Airship Construction

An attempt to build an airship by Vickers, Sons & Maxims Limited in 1911 had resulted in a catastrophic failure when HMA No. 1 snapped in half whilst being brought out of its shed on 24th September 1911.¹⁰⁸ This was not the end of the airship story and *The Barrow Herald* reported on 7th June 1913 that an Airship Shed was to be built on Walney.¹⁰⁹ By August the same year it is reported that an order for five airships had been received from the Admiralty and construction of the shed was proceeding quickly.¹¹⁰ The shed was being built on land occupied by Furness Golf Club who had been given notice to quit holes four to eight.¹¹¹ A number of airships were completed at the facility including HMA No. 9, which flew on 27th

¹⁰⁶ CAS (Barrow), BDP 175/1/21.

¹⁰⁷ CAS (Barrow), Z/3405/16.

¹⁰⁸ *Barrow Herald and Furness Advertiser*, 30 Sept. 1911.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 7 Jun. 1913.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 16 Aug. 1913.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 23 Aug. 1913.

November 1916¹¹² and the R80, which first flew on 19th July 1920. The shed was closed down in 1921. It was put up for sale, with one idea being that it could be used as a film studio, but nothing materialised and it was dismantled.¹¹³

Saltworks

The question of whether coal existed in the area was long discussed in the 19th century local press¹¹⁴ and a number of prospectors had searched fruitlessly for it.¹¹⁵ Searches were made at Hawcoat, Stank, Rampside and Gleaston and went on for many years and was still being reported as late as 1913.¹¹⁶ It was during one such search on Walney that salt was discovered.¹¹⁷ The quality and extent of the salt resulted in the formation of the Barrow and Liverpool Salt Company Limited. Over time, four different companies attempted to develop Walney salt. A works was constructed at the south end of Walney, with five large chimneys, reservoirs, filter banks and thousands of yards of cast iron pipes in use. Cottages were built for some of the workers with others using eight cottages on Piel Island nearby. Shipments were leaving the nearby wooden pier by 1898. A number of brine wells with accompanying derricks were in place and a local rail network was built on the site. The venture was not a success however, and despite attempts to keep it going the final salt company was wound up on 29th July 1902.¹¹⁸ This was the largest industrial venture attempted on Walney to-date.

¹¹² Airships and Aviation in Barrow; BAE website. [Airships and Aviation in Barrow | BAE Systems](#) (accessed 4 Apr. 2023). A video of the R80 in flight on Walney exists on-line [Barrow-in-Furness \(Airship\) - Airfields of Britain Conservation Trust UK \(abct.org.uk\)](#) (accessed 4 Apr. 2023) and of the R9 maiden flight [Watch Airship No. 9 online - BFI Player](#) (accessed 4 Apr. 2023).

¹¹³ F. Barnes, *Barrow & District* (1968), p.101.

¹¹⁴ An example being 'Have we coal beneath Barrow?', *Barrow Herald and Furness Advertiser*, 13 Jun. 1868.

¹¹⁵ A search at Hawcoat quarry by the Barrow Haematite Iron and Steel and mining Company reported: *Barrow Herald and Furness Advertiser*, 23 Jan. 1869; 6 Mar. 1869; 21 Aug. 1869.

¹¹⁶ *Barrow Herald and Furness Advertiser*, 20 Dec. 1913.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 2 Mar 1889.

¹¹⁸ B.D. Cubbon, *Barrow Salt a Historical Review* (2015).

Sand & Gravel Extraction

At the south end of Walney, sand & gravel extraction was taking place and being exported from the same wooden pier as the salt. It also utilised a 3ft gauge railway, originally built c.1880 to serve the salt works.¹¹⁹ The pier stayed in use until 1962 when it closed following storm damage. The rolling stock was scrapped the same year.¹²⁰ The Piel and Walney Sand & Gravel Company became the Roose & Walney Sand & Gravel Company in 1960. Sand and gravel were also extracted from the north end of Walney by W. McLung & Sons of North Scale.¹²¹

From 1963 the site of the salt works and gravel extraction at south Walney has been leased from the Holker Estate by South Walney Nature Reserve and is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and a Special Protection Area (SPA). It is home to a colony of grey seals as well as many species of birds.

Oyster farm

In 1978 the lagoons left over from the gravel extraction were put to use as an oyster farm to rear seed oysters. The lagoons are fed with sea water by pumps.¹²² It operates in 2023 as Seasalter (Walney) Ltd.

Services

Retail

¹¹⁹ Piel and Walney Gravel Co. Ltd.; *Narrow Gauge Railway Magazine*, No 51: Jul. 1969.

¹²⁰ B.D. Cubbon, *Barrow Salt a Historical Review* (2015).

¹²¹ McLung objected to the proposed airfield at the North End in an Air Ministry enquiry in February 1939 reported in the *Lancashire Evening Post*, 16 Feb. 1939.

¹²² *Evening Mail*, 15 Jun. 1984.

As part of the building of Vickerstown a row of shops was built on Douglas Street, including a baker, a hardware store and a post office. Other shops were built on Mikasa Street. A number of co-operative stores also opened, on Naiad Street, Powerful Street and later, on the Promenade. The building of the estates at Rainey Park and West Shore saw the opening of another row of shops on Mill Lane. Here there was a butcher and another post office. In 2023 there is one general store in the Mill Lane shops and one in Douglas Street. A Co-operative which also functions as the island's only post office is on Amphitrite Street and a small Tesco is on Ocean Road.

Visitor Economy

The Crown Hotel at North Scale was in existence before 1868¹²³ and is still operating in 2023. A William White built a house on Walney in 1868, at a cost of £600, which became the Ferry Hotel.¹²⁴ A public hotel, The Castle House, was built at Biggar sometime between 1873 and 1890. In 1899 a George Samuel Heath applied for a licence for Castle House. Mr Heath stated that he didn't need a seven-day licence as he intended to use it as a middle-class hotel for the accommodation of visitors from a distance. Those opposed to the licence were of the opinion that a licensed house would place temptation in the way of young children. Despite backing, legal representation and the fact that some 50,000 people came to Walney during that summer, it was refused.¹²⁵ During the Second World War Castle House was occupied by soldiers and was then boarded up for many years. Another licence application, made in 1949, was refused, but eventually, in 1950, a licence was granted to a Mr John Wood who sold the House to Cases brewery in April 1954. It is open in 2023.

¹²³ *Soulby Advertiser*, 2 Jan. 1868. (See also James Melville, 'North Scale and the Old Crown Public House', *The News*, 6 Dec. 1974.

¹²⁴ *Barrow Herald and Furness Advertiser*, 5 Sept. 1868.

¹²⁵ *The Advertiser*, 31 Aug. 1899.

Being a mainly residential island with little attraction for tourists, there has never been much provision in the way of hotel accommodation since the early 20th century. In 2023 the King Alfred Hotel operates as a hotel having long been a pub/restaurant. The former Presbyterian Church on Douglas Street also offers B&B accommodation. Both are frequented by the many contractors who work at BAE during the week. A popular holiday home and caravan complex at the south end of the island opened in 1986.¹²⁶

SOCIAL HISTORY

The days when the majority of islanders worked in agriculture are past. With little in the way of business on the island to employ people the vast majority spend their days off the island, making it a typical dormitory settlement. The character of the island is predominantly working class, with both North and South Vickerstown providing mainly small to medium sized terraced and semi-detached housing. In 2021, 79 per-cent of houses were owner-occupied and 20 per-cent rented.¹²⁷ The building of Vickerstown in the very early years of the 20th century by the Isle of Walney Estates Company increased the islands population substantially and brought the need for more social opportunities and communal amenities.

Library and Institute

A library was established by The Isle of Walney Estates Company in 1902 at Vickerstown Public Hall, Chapel Lane.¹²⁸ In 1948 the old army canteen on the Promenade was converted

¹²⁶ First registered at Companies House in Oct 1986. [WALNEY ISLAND SOUTH END CARAVAN SITE LIMITED filing history - Find and update company information - GOV.UK \(company-information.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/company-information-service); <https://southendcaravanpark.co.uk/> (accessed 28 Jan. 2023)

¹²⁷ ONS, Census 2021.

¹²⁸ *Vickerstown Chronicle*, 1902.

into a Community Hall and library. A purpose-built library was built on Central Drive in 1967.¹²⁹ The Vickerstown Institute opened in October 1902, in a large house in Gatacre Street but moved to a larger custom-built premises on Central Drive in December 1916.¹³⁰ The Institute became a pub in 2011, closed in 2018 and has now been converted to housing.

Inns and Alehouses

The first amenities on Walney were the public houses of Biggar village. The Queen's Arms first appears in the records of the Lancashire Alehouse Recognizances in 1773¹³¹ and the New Inn opened as a beer house in 1869. The former still operates whilst the latter closed in the 1970s. Two public houses were planned for Vickerstown but eventually only one was built – The King Alfred. It was opened on 15th February 1904 by Lord Grey, and worked along the lines of the Public House Trust movement where the landlord made more commission from soft drinks than from the sale of alcohol.¹³² The King Alfred closed temporarily at one time but is now fully operational. Instead of building a second public house, an off-licence opened on Methuen Street. It closed at the end of the 20th century. Other pubs on the island have included The George (built 1916) on Central Drive, now demolished and The Periscope (1960s) on Mill Lane, also demolished.

Recreational Areas

The spectacular growth of Barrow from the mid-19th century led to a rise in the number of people using the ferries to cross to Walney to spend their leisure time at the beach. This constituted trespassing. The farmers of Biggar put up fences but these were pulled down. In

¹²⁹ CAS (Barrow), BA/L/14/4.

¹³⁰ *Liverpool Journal of Commerce*, 26 Dec. 1916.

¹³¹ Lancashire Archives, DDKE/2/13.

¹³² *Vickerstown Chronicle*, 26 Feb. 1904.

1876 an organised mass trespass took place, watched by the police.¹³³ This became known as ‘the Battle of Biggar Bank’. The inhabitants took cases to court and won.¹³⁴ The council stepped in and at first leased the land from the villagers¹³⁵ before buying them out. The council spent £4,000 converting Biggar Bank into a recreational area. The grand opening was on Good Friday 1883 and the local press reported that thousands attended.¹³⁶ A little later a shelter and pavilion were built by the council;¹³⁷ both survived before being demolished in the late 20th century. The Roundhouse, built in the 1970s, stands on the site of the original shelter, it is now a community hub and café.

In the mid-1920s there was a putting green on the area directly in front of the Castle House but even this was controversial with two petitions sent to the council in 1925 asking for the ‘prompt removal of the obstruction.’ They were defeated.¹³⁸ In 1939 an amusement park and play beach was opened at Biggar Bank¹³⁹ and a couple of cafes were on land across the road from the pavilion- one named Binder’s and the other named Helling’s. In June 1930 it was proposed to open a bathing pool on Biggar Bank,¹⁴⁰ and it opened on 20th June 1931.¹⁴¹ It was open each summer season Whit to September and swimming galas were held there. Alongside the bathing pool were a yachting pool and a children’s paddling pool. The pool was popular until the mid-1960s when it closed.¹⁴² It was demolished in 1993.¹⁴³

¹³³ *Barrow Pilot*, 18 Mar. 1876.

¹³⁴ *Barrow Herald and Furness Advertiser*, 19 Aug. 1876.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 8 Dec. 1877.

¹³⁶ ‘Biggar Bank’, *Evening Mail*, 6 Jun. 1969.

¹³⁷ *Soulby Advertiser*, 17 May 1883.

¹³⁸ *Lancashire Daily Post*, 6 Oct 1925.

¹³⁹ *North West Daily Mail*, 29 May 1939.

¹⁴⁰ *Lancashire Evening Post*, 3 Jun. 1930.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 20 Jun. 1931.

¹⁴² *North Western Evening Mail*; 14 Apr. 2019.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 19 Mar. 1993.

James Dunn Park, between Vickerstown north and Vickerstown south, owned by the Isle of Walney Estates Company, was opened on 30th May 1902.¹⁴⁴ Facilities included a swan pond and a band-stand. Pierrot shows regularly took place. The company also provided allotments for the residents and a plant nursery on Avon Street.

The Walney Theatre and Picture House plans were approved in 1913 and it opened a little while later.¹⁴⁵ It closed in 1959 and stood empty for some years before being redeveloped as a supermarket around 1964. It didn't succeed in this venture and was demolished in 1983.¹⁴⁶

Amateur Sport

Golf was first played on the island by Scotsmen who came to Barrow when the Barrow Flax and Jute Works, and Barrow Shipbuilding Company's need for workers resulted in large numbers of people from Dundee and the Clyde areas coming to Barrow. They originally played on Biggar Bank. Furness Golf Club was established in 1872 and celebrated its 150th anniversary in 2022. The sixth oldest club in the country, they played a six-hole course, then nine, rising to 18 holes at the present time.¹⁴⁷ The course is laid out on the West side of the island between Walney School and Earnse Bay caravan park.

Education

Pre-1900

¹⁴⁴ *Lancashire Evening Post*, 1 Jun. 1902.

¹⁴⁵ *Barrow Herald and Furness Advertiser*, 2 Aug. 1913.

¹⁴⁶ [Walney Theatre in Barrow-in-Furness, GB - Cinema Treasures](#) (accessed 18 Jun. 2023).

¹⁴⁷ Furness Golf Club, *Furness Golf Club – A Centenary Story* (1972).

In 1662 the curate, Thomas Thompson, was licensed to teach boys at Walney. It is assumed he taught in the chapel.¹⁴⁸ By the early 18th century there was a ‘chapel cess’ payment made for repairs to the church and schoolroom.¹⁴⁹ The curate still acted as schoolmaster into the 19th century.¹⁵⁰ A purpose-built school was established on the Promenade in 1856 by Mrs Michaelson in memory of her husband, T.Y.P. Michaelson, who had died young. The school was said to accommodate between 80 and 100 children.¹⁵¹ As the building of Vickerstown increased the housing stock of the island from 1900 onwards, schooling became a serious problem. A temporary school was erected on Latona Street for the tenants of North Vickerstown, with access from Back Latona Street. Another temporary wooden structure was erected close to Biggar village for the children of South Vickerstown, Tummerhill, Biggar and the South End farms and the Salt works. In 1900 the average attendance was 19 children.¹⁵²

Post-1902

A permanent school, Vickerstown School, opened on Latona Street in 1902,¹⁵³ with ten classrooms and accommodation for 600 children. It moved to a new site on Mill Lane in 2011.¹⁵⁴ Its current capacity is 210 with 176 pupils in December 2023.¹⁵⁵ Ocean Road school opened in a temporary building in 1905 before a permanent structure opened on 28th August 1917.¹⁵⁶ In 1979 it merged with the Secondary Modern School at Sandy Gap (opened 1958).

¹⁴⁸ Clergy of Church of England database; <https://theclergydatabase.org.uk/> (accessed 14 Dec. 2023).

¹⁴⁹ H. Gaythorpe, ‘Walney Chapel’, CW2, xx (1920), p.101.

¹⁵⁰ Below, Religious Hist.

¹⁵¹ *Soulby Advertiser*, 25 Sept. 1856.

¹⁵² James Melville, ‘Biggar village’s wooden school’, *Evening Mail*, 29 Sept. 1978.

¹⁵³ *Lancashire Evening Post*, 30 Aug. 1902.

¹⁵⁴ BBC News, [Vickerstown Primary School opens - BBC News](#) (accessed 6 Dec. 2023).

¹⁵⁵ [Vickerstown School - GOV.UK \(get-information-schools.service.gov.uk\)](#) (accessed 6 Dec. 2023)

¹⁵⁶ CAS (Barrow), BDS/75/1/2, Ocean Road School Log Book.

to become Walney Comprehensive. The original Ocean Road school building was demolished in 1993. The school currently has a capacity of 900 pupils with 479 enrolled in 2023.¹⁵⁷ South Walney Primary School opened in 1956¹⁵⁸ and had 191 pupils on roll as of December 2023, with a capacity of 240.¹⁵⁹ North Walney Primary opened in the 1960s and moved to new premises nearby in the early 1990s. It has a capacity of 161 pupils but only 24 pupils in December 2023.¹⁶⁰ St Columba's Catholic School opened in 1916 with a church attached. When the new church opened in 1958, the school transferred to the old school building. New classrooms were constructed in 2020. It has a capacity of 240 pupils with 204 pupils in December 2023.¹⁶¹ The Richard Brunskill Special School on Moor Tarn Lane opened in 1963 and closed in 1991. It was replaced by George Hastwell Special School with a capacity of 90 and with 87 pupils in December 2023.¹⁶²

Social Welfare

See Barrow-in-Furness

RELIGIOUS HISTORY

Walney belonged to the ancient parish of Dalton, but it was difficult for Walney inhabitants to attend church due to the distance and the tides. The first mention of a chapel-of-ease on Walney is the appearance on a Saxton's map of Lancashire, dated 1577. A new church, Walney St Mary the Virgin, was built in 1852, and replaced in 1908. Several non-conformist

¹⁵⁷ [Walney School - GOV.UK](#) (accessed 6 Dec. 2023).

¹⁵⁸ Fred Barnes, *Barrow and District* (1968), p.123.

¹⁵⁹ [South Walney Infant and Nursery School - GOV.UK](#) (accessed 6 Dec. 2023).

¹⁶⁰ [North Walney Primary & Nursery School - GOV.UK](#) (accessed 6 Dec. 2023).

¹⁶¹ [St Columba's School - GOV.UK \(get-information-schools.service.gov.uk\)](#) (accessed 6 Dec. 2023).

¹⁶² [George Hastwell School Special Academy - GOV.UK](#) (accessed 6 Dec. 2023).

chapels were built from the later 19th century, and a Roman Catholic chapel from 1916. The three churches which remain on the island in 2023 are, St Mary's, St Columba's Roman Catholic Church, and the Vickerstown Methodist church on Warren Street.

Parochial organisation

From the Middle Ages Walney belonged to the ancient parish of Dalton, within the archdeaconry of Richmond and in the diocese of York. From 1537 the archdeaconry was assigned to the diocese of Chester until 1856, when Furness was transferred to the see of Carlisle. A chapel-of ease on Walney is known to have existed by 1577. It has been suggested that it was one of several chapel built in the Furness as a result of the Royal Commission of 1563, appointed to enforce the Act of Uniformity.¹⁶³ Rebuilt in 1852, the chapel was referred to as a church from 1856 and its dedication to St Mary was recorded in 1873.¹⁶⁴

Advowson, Income and Endowment

The vicar of Dalton is the patron. In 1717 it was said that the inhabitants had long subscribed an annual sum of £9 14s. to pay for a curate, this amount being based on a tax of 13½d. for each tenement.¹⁶⁵ There was a benefactions through Queen Anne's Bounty in 1750.¹⁶⁶ In 1851 the endowment was recorded as £80.¹⁶⁷

Religious life

¹⁶³ H. Gaythorpe, 'Walney Chapel', *CW2*, xx (1920) p.99.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ *The Cumbria Parishes 1714-1725 from Bishop Gastrell's Notitia, with additions by Bishop Porteous 1778-1779*, ed. L.A.S. Butler (CWAAS, Rec. Ser., Vol. XII, 1998), p....

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*; H. Gaythorpe, 'Walney Chapel', *CW2*, xx (1920), p.98.

¹⁶⁷ *Religious Census of 1851* (Surtees and CWAAS, 2019), 312.

A chapel of ease would have been much desired given the distance and difficulties of travelling to Dalton Parish Church. How long the fabric of the Elizabethan chapel survived before the rebuilding on 1852 is unclear. The Religious Census of 1851 ambiguously described the extant chapel as being 200-300 years old.¹⁶⁸ It has been said that the chapel was rebuilt and extended in the late 17th century, with a tower added about 1744.¹⁶⁹ The pre-1852 chapel was rectangular in plan, built of cobblestones, roughcast outside and whitewashed inside and out. There were three windows on the south side, two on the north side and one at the east end – all being square with wooden frames. A square tower which served as a porch and a belfry with a bell, projected from the west end.¹⁷⁰

In 1650 there was a ‘reader’ there, paid by the inhabitants.¹⁷¹ In 1652 it was noted that minister was a Mr. Soutwerke, a Presbyterian (1649-1657). In 1652, George Fox attempted to speak with this man after a service ‘but he got away, and would not be seen at his house.’¹⁷² A Thomas Thomson was appointed in 1661. He died in 1709 after having held the curacy for 47½ years.¹⁷³ Thereafter, several curates came and went, each staying for a few years.¹⁷⁴ This changed with the arrival of Samuel Hunter in 1741, who served as perpetual curate for the next 61 years, resigning just before his death in 1802.¹⁷⁵ The earliest Registers of Baptisms and Burials date back to Hunter’s incumbency, starting in 1744, and he was able to record that there was only one Roman Catholic on the island in 1780, a man who worked as a customs officer.¹⁷⁶ One of Hunter’s assistant curates was John Harrison, who was already schoolmaster

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ H. Gaythorpe, ‘Walney Chapel’, *CW2*, xx (1920), p.99-100.

¹⁷⁰ CAS (Barrow), Z/K/134, Harper Gaythorpe, Walney church and its registers.

¹⁷¹ <http://www.walneyparishchurch.co.uk/incumbents.html> (accessed 2 Feb. 2023).

¹⁷² H. Gaythorpe, ‘Walney Chapel’, *CW2*, xx (1920), p.98.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ <http://www.walneyparishchurch.co.uk/incumbents.html> (accessed 2 Feb. 2023).

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ H. Gaythorpe, ‘Walney Chapel’, *CW2*, xx (1920), p.99.

on the island before seeking holy orders.¹⁷⁷ Hunter's son-in-law and one time assistant curate, John Troughton, served as incumbent from 1805 until 1839.¹⁷⁸

John Park was a non-graduate who arrived as incumbent in 1846 and remained until his death in 1875.¹⁷⁹ In 1851 he recorded 150 sittings, of which 120 were free. The usual attendance was 100 in the morning, with 32 children at Sunday School, with 40 in the congregation for the afternoon service and 32 at Sunday School.¹⁸⁰ A replacement chapel was built in 1852¹⁸¹ and opened on 27th February 1853, following the raising of money by public subscription.¹⁸² This chapel remained in use for 55 years. The increase in the population of Walney after the building of Vickerstown made it necessary to build a larger church. Through the efforts of the then Revd Charles Lacy Hulbert, a new church, Walney St Mary's, was built on a site adjoining the churchyard, given by Vickers Ltd.¹⁸³ It opened in 1908 and was dedicated on 3rd October in that year.¹⁸⁴ The chapel of 1853 was demolished.

The first non-conformist place of worship on the island was the Methodist New Connexion chapel on Teasdale Road, North Scale. It was built on land bought from local builder William Gradwell¹⁸⁵ and opened in March 1881.¹⁸⁶ Religious services ended in 1907.¹⁸⁷ It was demolished sometime after 1979.¹⁸⁸ A Wesleyan Methodist church was started on the

¹⁷⁷ <http://www.walneyparishchurch.co.uk/incumbents.html> (accessed 2 Feb. 2023).

¹⁷⁸ <http://www.walneyparishchurch.co.uk/incumbents.html> (accessed 2 Feb. 2023).

¹⁷⁹ <http://www.walneyparishchurch.co.uk/incumbents.html> (accessed 2 Feb. 2023).

¹⁸⁰ *Religious Census of 1851*, 312.

¹⁸¹ *Soulby's Ulverston Advertiser and General Intelligencer*, 17 May 1855.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 5 Dec. 1850.

¹⁸³ H. Gaythorpe, 'Walney Chapel', *CW2*, xx (1920), p.102.

¹⁸⁴ *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 5 Oct. 1908.

¹⁸⁵ CAS (Barrow), Z/361, conveyance.

¹⁸⁶ *Barrow Herald*, 26 Mar. 1881.

¹⁸⁷ *North Western Evening Mail*, 9 Mar. 1979.

¹⁸⁸ The author took a photograph of the chapel in 1979, it was since demolished.

Promenade with the laying of a foundation stone on Easter Monday (4th April) 1904.¹⁸⁹

Opened in 1905,¹⁹⁰ it stood on land donated by The Isle of Walney Estates Company.¹⁹¹ In 1998 the congregation moved into a nearby building on Warren Street, with the old church being converted into three flats.

Plans for a Presbyterian church on Walney were drawn up by local architect William Moss Settle in 1905.¹⁹² Built on Douglas Street in 1907, it opened in 1909 and closed in the late 1970s and later became the Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses.¹⁹³ It is currently a bed and breakfast hotel. A Congregational Mission Hall was opened in Knox Street in 1902.¹⁹⁴

The Roman Catholic church of St Columba's was first built as a chapel in 1916 and was supplied from St Patrick's on Barrow Island.¹⁹⁵ The current church building had its foundation stone laid on 18th November 1957.¹⁹⁶ The church opened with Christmas midnight mass in 1958.¹⁹⁷

Church Architecture

Walney St Mary's, built in 1908, was designed by Paley & Austin of Lancaster in a Gothic Revival style.¹⁹⁸ Built from coursed, squared sandstone with ashlar dressings, the main roof

¹⁸⁹ *Soulby's Ulverston Advertiser and General Intelligencer*; 7 Apr. 1904.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 27 Apr. 1905.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.* 7 Apr. 1904.

¹⁹² CAS (Barrow), BDFC/P/W/14.

¹⁹³ CAS (Barrow), BDFC/P/W.

¹⁹⁴ B. Trescaheric, *Vickerstown, A Marine Garden City* (Hougenai Press, 1983).

¹⁹⁵ F. Barnes, *Barrow & District* (Barrow Corporation, 1968).

¹⁹⁶ *Evening Mail*, 18 Nov. 1957.

¹⁹⁷ The Parish of "Our Lady of Furness" [St Columba's Church | The Parish of "Our Lady Of Furness"](#) (accessed 26 Apr. 2023).

¹⁹⁸ CAS (Barrow), BPR/20/C/6/14.

has red tiles while the side aisles are roofed in slate. The nave consists of five bays, with a lean-to south porch and aisles, the latter featuring square-headed, mullioned windows. The chancel, with its arched chancel ceiling with bow-string truss, has two bays, with a lean-to south chapel and north vestry. The west end was completed in 1928.¹⁹⁹ The church was extended in 1930/31, again to a design by Paley and Austin.²⁰⁰

Local Government

See Barrow-in-Furness.

¹⁹⁹ NHLE, no. 1291841, 'Church of St Mary' (accessed 2 Feb. 2024).

²⁰⁰ CAS (Barrow), BPR/20/C/14.