

# 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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## Amendments to Volunteer dates:

- **Open Day and Seal Watch Training**



Some of you may already be aware that in the last newsletter the date for the March Open Day & Seal Watch training read Sunday 26th.

This SHOULD read Sunday 25th.

- **Seal Watching, Open days (and Seal Disturbances)**

Over the years our Seal Watching events have been affected by sailing activity in the Estuary, especially close to and on the Hoyle bank. This is where the seals haul out to rest before returning to feed as the tide returns. When you see them landing you understand why the term "haul out" is used; it is quite ungainly the way the animals drag themselves clear of the water.

When the sailing events and Seal Watch/ Open Days (SW/OD's ) do fall on the same day it usually means that there are very few seals to see on the bank. This is because when the seals are disturbed they take to the water and have to forego their rest time.



This year the Committee has circulated a letter to 7 of the local Sailing Clubs, detailing our events programme. As a result we have learned already from one of them that on Saturday, June 23rd there is a big National Sailing event involving all the local clubs. We had already scheduled a SW/OD for that date so we had to re-think. In addition there is going to be a big kayaking event on the Sunday .

In the end the decision was made to stick with the event on the 23rd. but to add another one earlier in the month. The other suitable low tide is on Sunday, June 10th, between 11:30 and 4:30. This is a first - two SW/OD's in one month!

We will keep you informed with FoH on-going efforts to try to minimize the disruption and potential harm to the seals.

Allen & Barbara Burton

## Seal Watching Group 2018

The seal watchers are a group of volunteers from Friends of Hilbre who are present on the island on each Open Day from March to October. We set up the telescope so that visitors to Hilbre can view the grey seals that haul out on the sand bank over low tides. We are also able to give them some information about the seals, although we are not experts, just enthusiastic amateurs.



Many people are delighted and amazed to see the seals as they had not realised that so many could be seen from Hilbre. Last season was mostly successful as there were generally 200 or more seals hauled out on these Open Days.

Unfortunately on a couple of occasions people from local sailing clubs landed on the sand bank which meant that the seals disappeared into the water and therefore lost some of their necessary resting time. When it is high tide and the sand bank is covered the seals are swimming and searching for food.

If you would like to be one of the seal watch volunteers we can offer training and notes giving you the necessary information so that you can answer visitors questions. You need to be a member of Friends of Hilbre and over 18 years of age, this is for insurance purposes. If you decide that this is for you please contact me on 0151 632 5889 or email [juneat42@gmail.com](mailto:juneat42@gmail.com)

**June Atkinson**

## Wheatear:

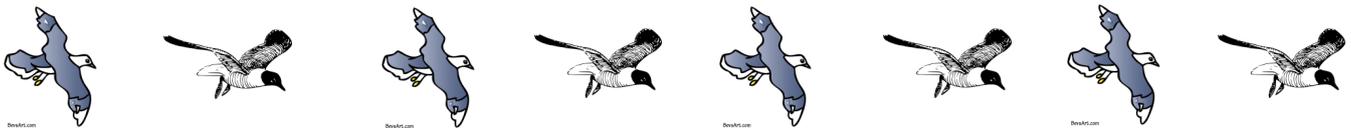
A Wheatear: perfectly held in the expert hands of one of Hilbre Island Bird Observatory's trained and licensed bird ringers. This is part of a process of catching and ringing avian visitors on Hilbre.

It is a delicate operation, from catching, weighing, measuring and releasing birds in order to provide information about travel, numbers and condition of 'our' bird population. It all has to be done with the minimum of stress to the bird.



In the background, inside the Observatory, can be seen a hint of the world map showing the points across the globe where visiting birds have previously been sighted or where the birds seen on Hilbre have been spotted previously or subsequently.

**Allen Burton**



**Do you have any memories, or stories about Hilbre Island? 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](mailto:nickynor16@sky.com)  
(Please name file ' FoH Article')**

## Ranger's Report, February 2018:



A busy period is about to begin!

I will shortly be commencing the design and production of the graphics for the interpretive boards to be purchased with the grant money awarded to the Friends by the Burbo Bank Windfarm Extension Community Fund. The input from the Friends will be vital so top quality, accurate and interesting material can be displayed for visitors to the island. I will be in touch with the Committee shortly to arrange a few dates where content and design can be discussed.

Work has recommenced on the Buoymaster's Stores to move along the idea of having the building open to the public on occasion during the summer.

Again discussions will need to take place to ensure that the events can be staffed and supported properly and work in a way that is good for volunteers and visitors.

So far the island seems to have escaped serious damage from the winter weather. Some of the rock fall from a couple of years ago was moved by a big tide but that has been cleared by the midweek taskers and good, safe access is again possible.

Sunset Walk season is approaching again. I have included one for the Wirral Walking Festival in May. It will close the Festival on 31st May. I will lead the walk but support from the Friends would be appreciated. I would like to run at least 3 more of possible. One in June, July and August.

Power on the island is currently an issue. The inverter has been damaged beyond repair we think by a lightning strike. The whole system needs replacing and funding will need to be found. The generator can still be used for catering on Open Days but a new system will be required long term.

I would like to look at a couple of other projects too. The virtual tour and a limited reprint of the Hilbre leaflet is one and the rebuild of the look out in the Buoymaster's House is another.

I would also like to explore the possibility of making a bird hide/wet weather shelter in the old boat store below the toilets. Thoughts and input from FoH is always appreciated.

**Matt Thomas**



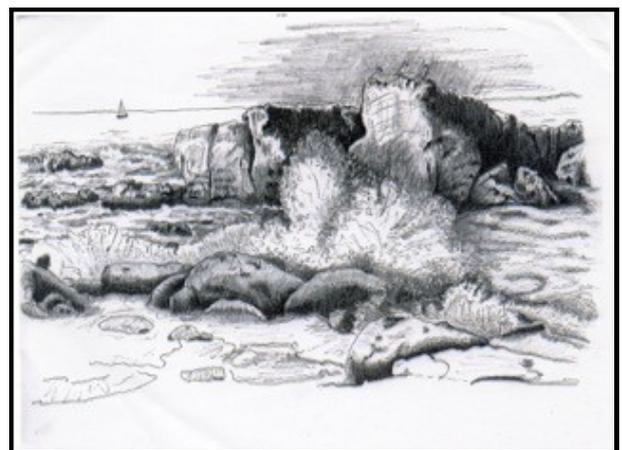
## Art Competition:

To the right is a drawing by our talented artist and Committee member Vilja Gatrell.

Are there any budding artists within the FoH Membership?

We announce a competition for all FOH artists, child or adult. 1st prize £10:00, 2nd Prize £5.00. The winning pictures will be published in the newsletter and displayed at the AGM.

Please scan and send any submissions to [nickynor16@sky.com](mailto:nickynor16@sky.com), please title the email 'FOH Artist'. Please submit pictures by 5th April 2018.



**Nicky Norriss**

## Before and After Gate:



The two pictures show the same gate first as it was found by Matt the Ranger and then after renovation. It has spent most of its life hanging at the bottom of the steps down the cliff from one of the gardens on the east side of Hilbre. It had been there, I believe, since Vicky Seager was the resident Ranger some 20 years ago.

When Matt found it, it was in a very poor state, rusty all over and corroded away in some parts, lying on the rocks at some distance from home. He suggested we could have a replica made. The Committee agreed and Matt and I took the original

to Austrometals, a one man business in Meols where we had already had the gate from the Pig Sty renovated some time before.



Wolfgang, the owner, said he could patch it up as good as new. He also suggested adding the wave like crown on the top. As you can see the result is fine. It now hangs at the entrance to the paddock on the west side of the 2 storey building. It faces the gate to the Pig Sty Gate across the yard by Fog Cottage.

Allen Burton

## Tasks for 2018:

In January, members of the FoH committee visited Hilbre, with Matt Thomas, to review what tasks we could be involved in during the coming year.



Potential tasks include:

- The biggest and most important project is the Buoymasters' Store, which contains a lot of interesting artefacts as well as a considerable amount of rubbish! Matt would like to use this area to set up a sort of museum, where the public can learn more about the island and its history. The first step is for experts to ascertain what items can be classed as artefacts and to sort them into categories, ready for display. We then need to sweep out and prepare the building to exhibit the items.
-  Matt explained the displays which are intended for inside the Slate Shed. We are considering the use of QR' codes (see left) which are a way of providing additional information to the public, via mobile phones.
- It was suggested that the gas cage and empty, unused bottles in Fog Cottage yard should be removed and the whole area tidied up. Information about the past use of this area would be interesting for the public and they could enjoy this space on Open Days if we can provide a couple of benches.
- We are considering making the old boat house into a bird hide (at the top of the slipway near the Day Room) - with some decking, railings and a couple of benches, this area could also be used by the public on open days
- Painting the exterior and interior of the Day Room. Other buildings in the vicinity could also benefit from external painting.
- Repairs to the toilets, including repairing one roof, refreshing the interiors with a coat of paint and addressing problems with the sliding doors.
- Perennial tasks include
  - Removing invasive species, eg weeding, or bracken pulling to maintain the area of marine heather on the headland, in the south of Hilbre.
  - Litter picking
  - Other repairs, general tidying and other activities as directed by Matt.

