



Bidston Hill Lighthouse

(Wirral Peninsula, near the Birkenhead, Bidston, Merseyside)



History

Until 1769 there had been two lighthouses at Leasowe, Wirral to assist shipping approaching the River Mersey. When the lighthouses appeared aligned from the ships approaching the Mersey, the captains knew that they were approaching the correct channel. However, in 1769 one of the lighthouses, which had been situated a quarter of a mile off-shore at Leasowe, was washed away in a severe storm. It was decided therefore to replace it with one in a prominent and safer position further inland, and Bidston Hill, on the northernmost point of the sandstone ridge that forms the backbone of Wirral was chosen. In 1771, in the grounds of what is now the Proudman Oceanographic Laboratory, the first Bidston lighthouse was built by the Government. It was taken over by the trustees of the Liverpool Docks in 1815 and then by the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board in 1858. This was also the year in which the telegraph service, which was also on the top of Bidston Hill, and the lighthouse service were amalgamated.

The first Bidston Lighthouse was constructed of local sandstone, octagonal in shape and 55 feet high. There were five floors, the top one of which was the lantern room which had access to a railed external



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gallery. In the lantern room was an oil light said to consume one gallon of oil every four hours, and a single reflector thirteen and a half feet in diameter. Both of these were invented by William Hutchinson. Fumes from the oil were extracted by a flue through a cowl on the roof. The fixed white light, similar to that at Leasowe lighthouse, could be seen for twenty one miles.

After a century's service, in 1872, the original lighthouse at Bidston was demolished and a more modern structure was built a few yards further north, being completed in 1873. During the building process a temporary light was provided from the roof of the nearby telegraph office. The second, present lighthouse building is circular in design, and is again constructed from local sandstone, with a green conical roof. There are four floors connected by a spiral stone staircase to the third level, from where there is a steep wooden staircase to the lamp room. Here there is a very large window and access to an external railed gallery. The light was provided by a single lamp with an illuminatory power equivalent to 400 standard candles.

The lighthouse service was discontinued in 1913, due to the installation of buoys indicating the channel into Liverpool, and also the advances in marine navigation. In 2000, structural work was carried out by Wirral Borough Council, with the aid of lottery funding, New Opportunities Wirral, COPUS and NERC. Exhibits were created by staff from The Proudman Oceanographic Laboratory and the lighthouse was opened to the public during the Open Days of June and July 2000 and for several days since.

Location

