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## **St. Mary's Lighthouse**

**(St. Mary's Island, Whitley Bay, Tyne and Wear)**



### **History**

St. Mary's Island is a small island made of sandstone near the seaside resort of Whitley Bay, Tyne and Wear.

St. Mary's Island was originally called Bates Island, Hartley Bates or Bates Hill as it was originally owned by the Bates family who were prominent locally. It is sometimes known as Bait Island, probably due to a misunderstanding of the meaning of the name. The island is opposite Curry's Point on the mainland and is connected to the coast at low tide by a rocky causeway. The main feature of the island is St. Mary's Lighthouse. The lighthouse and adjacent keepers' cottages were built in 1898 by the John Miller company of Tynemouth, using 645 blocks of stone and 750,000 bricks. It was built on the site of a monastery where



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a small sanctuary light would have acted as a guide to passing ships. The lighthouse was decommissioned in 1984 and stands at 38m (120 foot) in height.

In medieval times there was a chapel on the island dedicated to St Helen. Within the chapel was the Lady Light, also known as St. Katherine's Light. The light was later, wrongly, ascribed to St. Mary and, as a result, the island became known as St. Mary's Island. It is debatable whether the light was used as a warning to shipping or was purely religious. Next to the chapel was a burial ground where monks and local people were interred. Traces of St. Helen's Chapel were destroyed when the lighthouse was built in 1898.

During the 19th century there was an inn, known as the 'Square and Compass', on the island, run by a Mr. George Ewen. In 1895, after complaints about rowdy customers trespassing on nearby land, the landlord, Lord Hastings, had Mr. Ewen and his family evicted from the island.

The lighthouse continued to function until 1984, when it was taken out of service.

While it no longer functions as a working lighthouse, it is easily accessible (when the tide is out) and is open to visitors who can climb the steps to the lantern room and can visit a small museum, a visitor's center, and a cafe.

### Location

