## Whitehead Heritage and Wellbeing Walking Trail

Welcome to the Whitehead Heritage and Wellbeing Trail.

The view across Whitehead's promenade and multi-coloured seafront will give you a sense of the real character and nature of this town. Whitehead is a pristine late-Victorian and Edwardian seaside resort, a place that has invited generations of visitors to stay, relax and enjoy its sights.

This walking trail will help you discover and enjoy Whitehead's many attractions, as well as some of its hidden gems (you'll get some healthy, low impact walking exercise in the process!) From historic monuments to bracing seaside strolls; Christian heritage to a Great War airfield; a quiet nature reserve to mighty steam engines, there's much to enjoy in this compact, friendly town.

Like all the best things in life, the sights of interest in Whitehead require a little time and effort to reach.  So be prepared for the weather - and wear a good pair of comfortable shoes!

## History of the Town

The origins of Whitehead go back to the early 1600s, when a small hamlet grew around Castle Chichester - you can see the ruins of the castle in Chester Avenue. This settlement had its own quay, and traded with Scotland. But it was the arrival of the railway in 1862 that provided the stimulus for Whitehead to grow and take on its present-day character. With rail travel, Whitehead became an important link between Larne and Belfast and people built homes in the area. The railway also encouraged day trippers and visitors to come to the town. Victorian entrepreneurs saw the potential of this trade, and so villas, hotels, cafes, churches, pathways and a seaside promenade were built. By the late 1800s /early 1900s, Whitehead had become a popular seaside resort.

Exploring the Whitehead Heritage and Wellbeing Trail on foot is a stimulating and enjoyable way to help stay healthy.  You'll see some fascinating places, learn some intriguing facts....and perform some useful exercise in the process.

The next location on the Trail is the Blackhead Path sign, located at the start of the Blackhead Path at the opposite end of this car park, a walk of about 40 metres from the Welcome sign.

## Destination 1: Blackhead Path

There were few things our Victorian forebears enjoyed more than a bracing seaside stroll. So in 1892, with the help of the railway company, Blackhead Coastal Path was laid out to attract day trippers and holiday makers to the growing resort of Whitehead.

Today this lovely coastal path still takes you on a bracing walk past the coves and sea caves on this rocky stretch of Belfast Lough's shoreline. At the end of the path there is a fairly steep climb up to Black Head Lighthouse, from where there are stunning views across the Irish Sea to the Copeland Islands and beyond to Scotland. Black Head Lighthouse went into operation in 1902 and over the years it has guided countless boats to safety in Belfast Lough, including of course, *RMS Titanic*.

After enjoying the view from the lighthouse, you can continue your walk at this higher level and return to Whitehead along on a surfaced path, via Muldersleigh Hill, McCrea's Brae and the Islandmagee Road (about 5km). Or if you prefer, simply descend again to the seaside path and retrace your steps back here (about 2.4km).

## Look out for...

The large boulders that sit near the shoreline are known locally as the Wren's Eggs. Geologists call them glacial erratics and they were deposited here when the ice sheets melted at the end of the last ice age, about 10,000 years ago.  The inlet on the Black Head side of the Wren's Eggs was once a busy port, called Port Davey. It was mentioned as far back as 1642 and remained in use until the 1970s.

The walk will take you past a cave in the Blackhead cliffs known as Smugglers' Cave. Whether or not it was used by smugglers is unclear, but it certainly was lived in by a man called Thomas McCartney, who came to the district around 1804.  He set himself up as a schoolmaster and made his home in Smugglers' Cave.

Like all the best things in life, the sights of interest along the Blackhead Path require a little time and effort to reach. So be prepared for the weather - and wear a good pair of comfortable shoes!

## Destination 2: Whitehead Bandstand, Promenade and Lido

Imagine...if you can... that it's a hot afternoon in June 1905. Close by is an elegant wooden bandstand in which the famous Red Viennese Band of London, under the leadership of its talented conductor, Herr Jacobs, is entertaining a large audience of elegantly attired ladies and gentlemen. The music is of a type played by any military band of the period, with an 'Austrian' feel, even though most of the musicians are probably British.

As you look along the seafront, you'll see a large number of equally well-dressed couples, some with small children, strolling along the wooden Promenade, made from railway sleepers. In true Edwardian style, the ladies are wearing large hats, some bedecked with ostrich plumes and they are shading themselves from the sun's glare with dainty parasols.

Such would have been a typical summer season afternoon in Edwardian Whitehead. The bandstand remained in regular use until the 1950s, but was demolished in 1959. The original wooden Promenade remained until 1936, when a more permanent walkway was constructed from concrete. It withstood the ravages of the sea for many years, until more works were required in the 1970s, and again in the 1990s.

Whitehead Promenade remains a wonderful place to stroll, whether the sun is shining or not. With the multi-coloured seafront on one side, and superb views over Belfast Lough on the other, there's no better way to do what our Edwardian forebears did....see, and be seen.

## The Lido and Swimming Pool

In September 1927, Whitehead Urban District Council took the decision to build a sea water swimming pool, with changing facilities, public toilets (the first in the town), shelters and a restaurant. More than 2,500 tons of concrete were used in its construction and it opened in May 1931.

For years, the 'swimming pond' was the scene of aquatic galas, diving competitions and water polo matches and in the summers of the early 1950s, two thousand bathers a week were using the facility. However, by the 1980s, the availability of indoor heated pools at leisure centres meant that fewer people were braving the colder seawater pool, so the decision was taken to close it. But who knows...Whitehead's tidal sea-water pool may yet again come back into fashion!

## Destination 3: County Antrim Yacht Club

Whitehead has always had an association with boats. In the mid-1600s, there was a regular packet service between Scotland and Whitehead, delivering goods and mail. Indeed, prior to the completion of the county road from Carrickfergus to Larne in 1854, and the arrival of the railways in the 1860s, most trade and travel to and from Whitehead was undertaken by boat.

The opening of the railway station in 1877 paved the way for day trippers and holiday makers to visit Whitehead. The first Whitehead Regatta was held in August 1879. It became a popular annual event, organised in time by Whitehead Sailing Club, and at present by County Antrim Yacht Club.

Whitehead Sailing Club was inaugurated in May 1903 and held its first club regatta, the Auld Challenge Cup, in August of that year. The first Captain of the Club was John Wylie, the distinguished physicist and inventor. He designed the Waverley class yacht, of which only 18 were built. Each Waverley yacht was named after a place or a character featured in the novels of Sir Walter Scott. The greatest tragedy to occur at the Club was on 27 May 1950, when a Waverley class yacht was swamped and sank with the loss of four young members.

Since 1909, the club has been known as County Antrim Yacht Club. That same year, the decision was taken to build a new club house – for the princely sum of £415. The clubhouse has been added to and improved many times over the years and in 2009, it celebrated its centenary. County Antrim Yacht Club is now a recognised training centre under the Royal Yachting Association.

## The Boathouse

County Antrim Yacht Club is the owner and custodian of one of the most historic buildings in Whitehead. Its Boathouse was originally built around 1870. The building was sensitively restored in 2011 and it retains a number of its original features, such as ornate timber bargeboards and stone detailing. Today this elegant remnant of Whitehead's maritime history stores kayaks and canoes for visitors following the 'East Coast Canoe Trail' from Cushendall to Portaferry. It also serves as a useful start/finish point for kayakers visiting the scenic 'Gobbins Cliffs' area.

## Destination 4: Coastguard Station and Boathouse

When the Coastguard service came into being in 1822, its main job was to save monies for the Revenue by preventing smuggling. Saving life was very much its secondary role. It was not until 1923 that the responsibility for the service passed to the Board of Trade and the Coastguards officially took on their life-saving role.

For many years, the coastguards at Whitehead had been stationed in thatched cottages, near Marine Parade. Then in November 1869, the Admiralty leased a plot of land at the side of Beach Road on which to build a Coastguard station. This attractive terrace of seven redbrick cottages with dressed-stone trim, was completed in 1871 at a cost of £1,732. The work included a dressed stone boathouse opposite the cottages. Now owned by County Antrim Yacht Club, the boathouse is a listed building and a fine remnant of maritime history within the Whitehead. It has been extensively refurbished to provide a storage facility for canoes and kayaks.

The Coastguard cottages may seem to have been designed purely for comfort, but closer examination reveals a number of defensive measures. Each of the end houses had a number of pistol holes, and there were pistol holes also built into the upper-floor, so that an attack from every point of the compass could be covered. In addition, the windows were protected by bullet-proof metal shutters and the houses had intercommunicating doors which allowed the crews access to the whole terrace in time of attack. However, these defensive measures were not exclusive to Whitehead - all Coastguard stations built in Ireland between the late 1850s and the late 1870s incorporated such features.

The Coastguard station was closed in 1931 and is now divided into private dwellings. It still retains most of its original exterior design and is a listed building.

## Part of the community

The Coastguards at Whitehead were an important part of the community. As well as carrying out their normal duties, old newspaper reports show that any time there was a fire, flood or an emergency in Whitehead, the police were inevitably assisted by the Coastguards. Photographs from 1894 show local children on a Sunday School outing enjoying a hearty tea at the Coastguard Boathouse.

## Destination 5: White Harbour & Nature Reserve

Whitehead takes its names from the headland at the old quarry, which at one time contained a thick seam of pure, white limestone rock. This has now been so extensively quarried that little of it remains. Further south, at derelict quarries cliffs around the townland of Knocknagullagh, deposits of limestone can still be seen.

We have records of mining activity here dating back as far as 1609, but the most active period was in the mid-1800s. The landowner at that time, David Stewart Ker, built White Harbour so that the stone could be more easily exported. Made from the local limestone, the main structure of the harbour remains intact to this day. Later, a deep-water wooden pier was built to give access to large ships. Small railway lines, called tramways, were built to carry the stone from the quarry face to the harbour.

Much of the Whitehead limestone was exported whole, for use in building construction or to be crushed down and used for road metal – the construction or repair of roads. Limestone was also burned in lime kilns along Beach Road, near the quarry. This process turned the rock into quicklime, a caustic material with a number of applications, including neutralising acidic soil. It is also used to make 'whitewash'. Many thatched cottage around the countryside were kept pristine white with an annual application of whitewash from Whitehead. You might even say that whitehead is built on limestone – it forms the foundations of many of the town's early villas.

The quarry closed in the 1920s, and for about thirty years, from the mid-1950s, it was used as the town dump. After lying unused from 1982, the site was transformed into the Beach Road Nature Reserve in 2008.

## Beach Road Nature Reserve

Whitehead quarry is an excellent example of how a landscape scarred by human activity can be returned to nature. Over the years it has been re-colonised by trees, shrubs and wildflowers, and these create an ideal environment for birds, insects and small mammals.

Winged residents include Song Thrush, Robin, Chaffinch, Wren, Fulmar, Blackbird, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Reed Bunting, Redpoll, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Goldcrest, Mistle Thrush, Woodpigeon, Bullfinch, Coal Tit, Raven, Rock Pipit, Meadow Pipit and Dunnock. The quarry also supports a population of as many as 20 pairs of fulmar. The raven, largest of all crows, can usually be seen around the quarry

between February and April. And a pair of peregrine falcons has bred successfully on several occasions.

The reserve also attracts a variety of butterflies. Butterflies need sugar-rich nectar to feed on, and they also need particular plants on which to lay their eggs. There is a good selection of flowers and plants here to provide food for butterflies and caterpillars. Orange Tip, Green-veined White, Large White and Small Tortoiseshell all thrive in dense hedging, trees and wildflowers that make up Beach Road Nature Reserve.

## Destination 6: Churches & Architecture

## St Patrick's Church of Ireland

The foundation stones for St Patrick's were laid in October 1907, with the new Lord Bishop of Down, Connor and Dromore, the Rt. Rev. Dr Crozier, participating in the proceedings. The new church in Victoria Avenue was opened by the Lord Bishop on Friday 24 July, 1908. St Patrick's was built to replace the Parochial Hall, or St Patrick's Hall, which had served not only as a church, but as venue for concerts, public meetings, plays and other functions for the preceding ten years.

## Whitehead Baptist Church

Although the Baptist church has had a presence in Carrickfergus borough for 150 years, the origins of the Whitehead Church are more recent. In the late 1970s, several local families attended services at Larne Baptist Church and in 1982, Larne Church decided to reach out to Whitehead with the view of establishing a church here. After a period of pastoral outreach, a plot of land on Slaughterford Road was purchased from Carrickfergus Borough Council in 1985. Whitehead Baptist Church was formally constituted on 14 February 1987.

## Whitehead Congregational Church

In 1902, when Whitehead Presbyterian Church decided to introduce a hymnary and an organ to its praise service, a number of the congregation objected and left the church. They made the decision to form a separate Presbyterian congregation in Whitehead. A site was acquired beside Castle Chichester and an iron church building was erected. This served the congregation well for 30 years, until it was replaced by the present day church, which opened in April 1940. An organ and church hymnary were introduced in 1942. In 1954, the decision to become a Congregational Church and the Church was received into the Congregational Union in 1959.

## Whitehead Methodist Church

With a growing Methodist membership within Whitehead by 1897, a plot of land of just over one acre ( about 0.5 hectare) on Balmoral Avenue was secured on long-term lease and work on the new church commenced in early 1899. The church, built by a local builder, David Barbour, opened for its first service on 1 July 1900. Portions of the site were subsequently sub-let to private tenants and in 1908, to the Masonic Order for a hall. The manse dates from 1909.

## Whitehead Presbyterian Church

The first Presbyterian place of worship in Whitehead was a corrugated iron church, built for £160 on a plot of ground near Slaughterford Bridge. It was formally opened on 13 July 1890, and although called the Presbyterian Hall, was used by worshippers of all denominations. Interestingly, 'wee tin churches' such as this were manufactured by the Harland & Wolff shipyard company and most were exported to support mission work overseas. In 1899, another iron church was built on Victoria Road, but it faced the problem of overcrowding during the summer months, when large numbers of visitors came to town. The present church on King's Road was completed in 1905 at a cost of £3,200, which included heating and lighting. Its bell tower was added in 1935.

## Our Lady of Lourdes Roman Catholic Church

The opening of Our Lady of Lourdes Roman Catholic Church took place on 25 April 1909. It replaced a temporary church, St Colman's, which had been built in 1899 and which subsequently was used as a school. The sum of £400 was collected in donations at the opening ceremony. Officiating at the service, Rev. F.C. Henry thanked his brother clerics for dedicating the church and it was reported that he also thanked '...those Protestant gentlemen of Whitehead and other districts who assisted...and who were present that day, while some who were unable to attend had sent generous subscriptions.' This was the first church in Ireland to be dedicated to Our Lady of Lourdes.

## The Bishop's House

At the junction of Victoria Avenue and Prince of Wales Avenue stands a dwelling known as the Bishop's house. Built in 1899, it was the former residence of the Bishop of Down and Connor. From 1919 to 1957 it was used as Whitehead High School.

## Destination 7: Whitehead Railway Station

Whitehead railway station is one of the best-known landmarks in the town. In fact, Whitehead has the railway to thank for its development from a small village to an attractive Edwardian seaside resort. The station opened on 1 May 1863: at that time it had one platform and an old carriage as a waiting room. The new station was opened at Whitehead in 1877. Its busiest period was from the late 1890s until about 1908, when its platforms would be packed full of day trippers during the summer months.

Whitehead actually has two stations, thanks to its history as a railway excursion town. The main 'through' station is still part of the Northern Ireland Railways network, whilst the terminus Whitehead Excursion Platform is now the headquarters of the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland (see below).

In 1860, in order to encourage the development of railway towns, the railway company introduced the 'Villa Ticket' system.  This entitled anyone building a three-storey villa within a mile of a railway station to 10 years' free first-class travel. By 1905, 550 such tickets had been issued, of which 145 had gone to Whitehead.

Whitehead Railway Station was sensitively refurbished in the early 1990s and while it continues to operate as a busy main line station, it still retains its Victorian charm.

## Railway Preservation Society of Ireland

Whitehead is home to the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland (RPSI), Ireland's principal operator of preserved main line steam trains.  The Society was formed in September 1964, when a group of dedicated enthusiasts decided to take action to preserve some of Ireland's fast-disappearing railway heritage. It now has the only collection of working main line steam locomotives and the largest collection of coaches in Ireland.

The Society is based at the Whitehead Excursion platform. Completed in 1907, this long platform allowed trains to arrive on either side and was built to handle the seasonal influx of visitors to Whitehead. But numbers slumped soon after it opened and it was never used to its full capacity.

On its "Summer Steam" open days, members of the public and enthusiasts are welcome to come along and have a short ride by steam train within the RPSI's site for a nominal charge. Future development plans for the site include installing a

station building and period signal box, and restoring the locomotive turntable to its former glory.

For further information visit www.steamtrainsireland.com

## Destination 8: Castle Chichester

Castle Chichester was built around 1604 for an English soldier, Sir Moyses Hill. It is a three-storey tower built mainly of basalt boulders with some old brick. The absence of fireplaces and large windows suggest that Castle Chichester was not designed as a dwelling, so it probably served as a watch-tower and store for the harbour and its surrounding area.

Sir Moyses Hill came over to Ireland as a military officer with the Earl of Essex in 1573 to suppress a rebellion by the clan O'Neill. He has been described as a "landless adventurer" and he was clearly shrewd and ambitious. In 1617, he was appointed Provost Marshall of Ulster by Lord Chichester and he went on to lease, acquire and purchase land near Belfast, Carrickfergus and Islandmagee. He also acquired the Kilwarlin estate - now Hillsborough - from the Magennises, and founded the Downshire dynasty. Sir Moyses Hill died at Hillhall near Lisburn in February 1630 at the age of 77 years.

## Mail Packet

By the middle of the 17th century, a sizeable village had grown around Castle Chichester. It had its own a harbour and quay, and a considerable amount of trade was conducted with Scotland. From 1669 to 1823, the Brice family lived in the Manor House that stands beside Castle Chichester. They were Agents for a mail boat service from Scotland that berthed at Castle Quay, just below the castle. Letters and other items of mail from Scotland would be loaded onto a small boat, which then delivered them from Castle Chichester to Belfast.

The Brices were paid the sum of £100 per annum for their mail service. It must have been a lucrative trade – records from the time tell us that '...*Randolph or Randal Brice of Castle Chichester (Whitehead), son of Robert, who also resided there, who died in November 1676 having amassed much wealth in trading with Scotland...*'. The mail packet station closed about 1740 when trade moved to Donaghadee.

Please be aware that Castle Chichester stands on private land.

## Destination 9: Whitehead Diamond Jubilee Wood

Carrickfergus Borough Council and the Woodland Trust have created a living, lasting legacy in Whitehead to commemorate the 2012 Diamond Jubilee, marking Queen Elizabeth's 60th year as monarch. The 60 acre woodland near Bentra Golf Course to the north of Whitehead was officially opened on Saturday 23rd June 2012 by Mrs. Joan Christie OBE, Her Majesty's Lord Lieutenant for County Antrim. The woodland contains 60,000 trees, a 2km of path network, a 1000sqm pond, a Commonwealth Tree Avenue planted with copper beech; wildflower meadows, picnic area and a sculpture designed by artist Kevin Killen and local school children.

Whitehead Diamond Jubilee Wood is one of the 'flagship woods' and the only Diamond Jubilee Wood in Northern Ireland. In total 60 Diamond Jubilee Woods have been planted throughout the UK. Each wood is at least 60 acres in size to symbolise 60 years of The Queen's reign.

## Destination 10: Whitehead Aerodrome

From 1915 to 1917, the site was home to the first military aviation facility in Ireland - one that played an important role in the First World War. Royal Naval Air Service airships based at Bentra patrolled the waters between Ireland and Scotland, combating the German U-Boat menace.

The airships operated from an airship station at Bentra, which had an airship shed comprising a steel frame covered by canvas and measuring 150 feet long by 45 feet wide and 50 feet high. Wooden huts provided accommodation for the pilots and engineers. At least four airships operated from the station at Bentra - SSZ11, SSZ12, SS20 and SS23. Various types of aircraft also landed at the station and it became known as Whitehead Aerodrome. Affectionately named "battlebags" by their crews and "blimps" by civilians, Royal Naval Air Service airships were a familiar sight around Britain's shores during the war years 1914 - 1918. At least 226 airships were built and operated by the Royal Navy during the First World War in a bid to beat the deadly German U-boats.

## Action in the Air

The primary task for the airships stationed at the Bentra Aerodrome was to protect the Princess Maud cross channel ferry and guard incoming convoys in the North Channel from German submarines. When the prevailing wind permitted, the crew would scout from the air, looking for submarines on the surface or the wake of a

periscope. Success depended on close cooperation between the naval airmen and the warships operating from Larne harbour.



Images courtesy of PJ O'Donnell