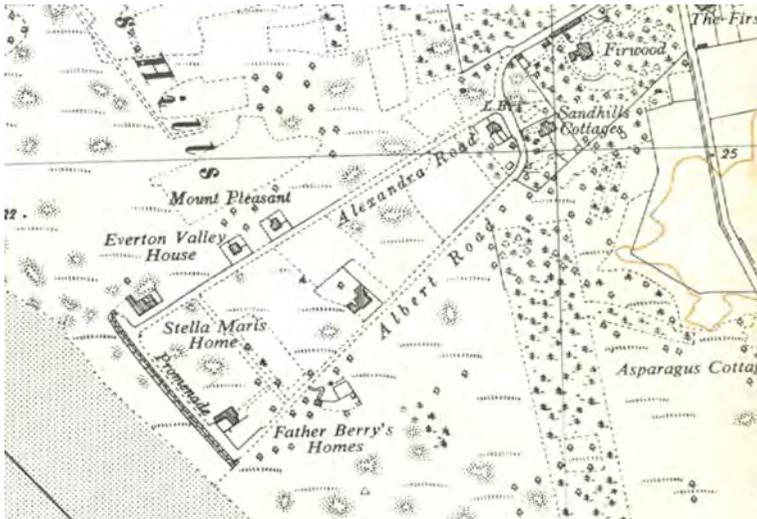


Formby-by-the-Sea OS map,1955.



In the late 19th C an attempt was made to develop a fully fledged sea-side resort on the coast here, to be known as 'Formby-by-the-Sea'. Here is an OS map of 1955 showing all that was achieved. There is even less to see now:- In archaeological terms the modern equivalent of a *'lost settlement'*! (Below; Rare Black Poplar deliberately introduced at the beginning of the proposed resort for amenity reasons, now sadly seem to epitomise its failure as a Resort but not as a Reserve!)..



Ravenmeols Heritage walks; instructions.

Walk 1. 'Lost Resort Trail'; (Approximately 2000 metres, mainly over unsurfaced sandy tracks). *Start from; Lifeboat Road car park noticeboard. SD 27421 06531*

Take the path from the notice-board towards the shore but after 100 m turn left at intersection heading south and crossing Lifeboat Road. Then passing through a style, you enter Ravenmeols LNR at the western end of a small conifer plantation planted in the early 20th century along the southern side of Lifeboat Road.

The path here is sandy, uneven, winding and narrow and liable to be overgrown in places but is the easiest way of reaching the formerly intended resort of 'Formby-by-the-Sea'. Watch out for brambles, dewberries and rabbit holes! Continue in a south-easterly direction across a reasonably level area of former 'sand-winning'. This will bring you to the site of the once intended resort, first passing over the site of a demolished house known as Mount Pleasant, SD 27644 05906. This stands half-way down an unmade road, Alexandra Road, leading to the sea. Turning west along Alexandra Road you will find occasional kerbstones in position and after a short gap the site of another Victorian residence 'Everton Valley House'. SD 27582 05872. Continuing towards the sea for approximately 200 m you reach the dunes and at this point the site of the resort's, originally intended hotel, 'Stella Maris' SD 27465 05840. This building with a flat roof had an interesting history ending during World War II as a Radar Station. The only remnant now to be found is the concrete base of a generator.

Stella Marris stood at the southern end of the 'Formby-by-the-Sea' promenade, (which still exists underneath the dunes). From here we will proceed South along the line of the buried promenade. After a short distance we will look for the previous site of Formby Coast Guard lookout. SD 27518 05714. We will also discover the still existing flight of steps down the face of the promenade onto the beach, (before the dunes accreted).

Continuing along the line of the buried promenade we pass in front of the one remaining house, 'Seabank House.' This was originally two semi-detached residences and until the 1950s marked on the OS map SD 27575 05636 as 'Father Berry's Home'. It was for the first half of the 20th century used, like other properties of the failing resort, by Liverpool and Manchester charitable organisations to provide short holidays for needy children. During World War II

It was requisitioned by the military. Having passed Seabank House we reach the dunes at the end of Albert Road and turn inland to follow the line of the road, running parallel to Alexandra Road. Leaving the Dunes, we pass an almost hidden bungalow to our right. This was originally a roughly constructed hut in a hollow in the dunes, where the 'tide-pole reader' lived. (explanation later!). Proceeding inland we pass the former site of 'The Briars', and then find on both sides of the road lines of windblown and rather strangely shaped Black Poplars. These are now a very rare species in this part of the world and it would seem were deliberately planted as 'amenity trees' when the intended resort was being constructed.

Passing further inland before reaching a point where Albert Road and Alexandra Road join we pass an open area between the two, once a thriving asparagus farm, but in the early 20th century identified as the site of a proposed railway station. This station was to have been sited on a new branch line from the Liverpool - Southport railway. Despite having received full approval and fully surveyed; because the economic climate at the beginning of the 20th century, it was not constructed. Had it in fact gone ahead the proposed resort of Formby-by-the-Sea, (intended to "rival Southport"), might well have succeeded!

At the junction of Albert and Alexandra Roads we finally see a fine Victorian mansion, 'Beach Lawn' its architecture typical of those that have now disappeared. Nearby a pair of semi-detached 'cottages' have a completely different style. These were designed by a highly regarded architect, A McMurdo a leading proponent of the late 19th/early 20th century 'vernacular revival' architectural style. McMurdo was a colleague of William Morris and other highly regarded masters of the 'Arts and Crafts' movement and 'Sandhills Cottage' is now a Grade 2 listed building.

From here we will turn left into Alexandra Road, heading back towards the sea but on reaching the Mount Pleasant site we retrace our steps back to Lifeboat Road.

Walk 2. 'Devils Hole' trail.

Start at Lifeboat Road notice-board and follow Walk 1 as far as Seabank House. Then cross Albert Road track and follow a zigzag route through the dunes to the site of former Royal Observer Corps bunkers. From here follow winding trail path to 'Devils Hole' Dune. Then, either drop down into the massive 'blowout' or head East to the remains of a former conifer woodland passing a former 'Starfish' control bunker to the south. You then reach St Luke's Church Road trackway. Head North along this, past Asparagus Cottage and find re-entrance through the woodland back to Albert Road and site of proposed loop line station. From here proceed by Alexandra Road, West to Valley house site and then return to Lifeboat Road.

A present-day satellite view of Ravenmeols Local Nature Reserve.

Trails are shown as a thin red line



Dune 'blow-outs' are a natural feature of coastal dunes but this one is not seen on aerial photos prior to the 1940's. It is believed that this one was started by a bomb aimed for the nearby 'Starfish' decoy during WW2. It is still increasing in size!



(Left); In 1915 however a single tract loop-line to run from the main line between Hightown and Woodvale, with a station at Formby-by-the-Sea was planned.

In 1930 an official report on the 'Future Development of SW Lancashire' was published. It suggested a new coast road from Hall Road, following the line originally planned for the single track railway—shown here on the edge of the dunes, joined by a newly created roadway from Formby Village.



(Left); Everton Valley House was in 1925 was the residence of Major F.M. Roome the architect of two of Formby's best know buildings, the Formby Council Offices and The Embassy Building ; also finally by Richard Formby a younger member of the family - for a golf course

(Right); Stella Maris. Built as a hotel It stood about 150 yds above HWL, had a flat roof and faced the sea, Probably not used as actual hotel for more than a short period., it became in turn a convalescent home for priests, a holiday home for Catholic children, and finally during WW2. a Chain Home High Radar Station.



(Left); The Promenade steps seen here in 1935 - more difficult to find now being hidden by scrub and even Black Poplar. The "first sod" was cut in 1876 when the Formby Land Company started constructing this the first item on their agenda,

(Right); 'Father Berry's Home' for poor children from Liverpool during the summer months during when twenty or so children at a time would enjoy the sand and sea. The manager at that time was a Rev. Fr. Bennett. We here have a link with the well known mid Victorian reformer Father Nugent .





(left), Rifle Range, (WW2 (Kings L.pool Regiment), The King's main depot was here in Formby at Harington Barracks throughout the second World War. Rifle practice took place on this open range , later at Altcar Rifle Range, This is our only surviving structural reminder of the King's Liverpool Regiment.



(Above, left), The remains of a WW2 ROC Observation Post on the dunes south of the Promenade . (Right); ROC Nuclear Monitoring Post built during the 'Cold War' in 1962.



(Left), 'The Briars', Albert Rd, 1976. Liverpool Catholic Girls Orphanage. (Convent of Notre Dame, Mount Pleasant). It looks just like any pair of Victorian semi-detached houses and in 1973 this photo shows nothing to signify it as a convent. The Army had used it.



SANDHILLS COTTAGE, a listed building set amongst the pines on the edge of the dunes, E of ALBERT ROAD. was designed by by A.H. Mackmurdo, and built in 1882 as a holiday cottage for a Mr Albert Crompton, who worked for the ship-owner Holt .in Liverpool. Now the home of Jonathan and Molly Rathbone.

Summary; Let us review the usage of the main properties, whose sites we have visited on this walk. It will be noticed that this period coincides with the 1930's 'Depression'. The most interesting is probably Seabank House as we here have a clear link with the well known mid-Victorian social reformer Father Nugent (who actually died in Formby) and his successor Father Berry. Both Father Nugent and Father Berry are well recognised as leading late 19th century/early 20th century child care leaders in Liverpool. Both were involved in the now somewhat controversial schemes to send poor Liverpool Children to start new lives in Canada. The Convent of Notre Dame was also closely connected.

One wonders why there was this geographic concentration of philanthropic effort here during that period on this remote coastal headland. I suggest the reason must be that because of the failure to develop a rail link, the resulting relative inaccessibility of this new property, led to drop in its market value and it then became easily available to charitable institutions, which in turn were under increasing pressure during the late 20's and 30's. In addition to these Holiday Homes there was during the summer months a great deal of camping in the area, some organised in camp-sites but a great deal completely informal.

This happy philanthropic use for Formby-by-the-Sea ended suddenly at the beginning of WW2 when virtually all houses and land were requisitioned for military and defence reasons. Unfortunately the use of this property by the military and then evacuees during the war years would have depressed market values even further thus leading to neglect and finally demolition in the mid 20th century.