

## CARRICKFERGUS AND DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY



### LIGHTHOUSE OR CROSS ISLAND OR BIRD ISLAND IN THE COPELAND ISLANDS

Located about 4 miles (7 km) north of Donaghadee, Co. Down and named an Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI). The common name of the islands came from the family of the Copelands who settled here in the 12<sup>th</sup> century in the time of John De Courcey but the Island has earlier connections with the monks of Bangor Abbey. This Island is now owned by the National Trust but administered by volunteer wardens of the Copeland Bird Observatory. It is about 24 acres and dedicated to wildlife preservation. The oil-burning lighthouse was built in 1815 succeeding a coal-burning beacon in operation from the early 1700s. The lighthouse now in ruins was decommissioned in 1884 when the light was transferred to a new lighthouse on Mew Island just to the east.

The lighthouse keepers' former premises and storehouse accommodates the volunteers and the laboratory where migratory birds are captured for examination, ringing, weighing, recorded and then released all within a few minutes from capture to minimise distress. This island is an important breeding site for Manx Shearwater and Eider. The rabbits on the island are important to the breeding of the Manx Shearwater as their grazing keeps a short sward that is desirable for the fledglings and their burrows provide nesting sites. There is a small stand of timber that is maintained to provide heat and fuel for cooking for the volunteers that makes them self-sufficient in this regard.

The island vegetation includes large areas of rank bracken, sea champions, elder scrub and many more. Of special note the island is said to mark the southern limit for Scots Lovage in Europe and the northern Limit for Sea Purslane in Ireland.

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