

AIA CONFERENCE 2020: TOUR DESCRIPTIONS

These outlines are intended to give a flavour of the tours. Note that some details may be subject to change on the day. However, tour routes will pass other features of interest where possible.

Tour A: Bidston Lighthouse and Observatory



Bidston Lighthouse (1873)

The first Lighthouse on Bidston Hill was built in 1771, further from the body of water it lit than any other lighthouse in the world, ever. The octagonal tower housed a massive parabolic reflector, twelve feet in diameter, developed at the Bidston Signals Station by William Hutchinson, Liverpool Harbour Master and one-time privateer.

The present Bidston Lighthouse was built by Mersey Docks and Harbour Board in 1873, to a design by G. F. Lyster. It served as Liverpool's principal lighthouse until 1913 and as an electric telegraph station until 1914.



Bidston Observatory (1866)

The Bidston Observatory was built in 1866 when the Liverpool Observatory had to relocate due to the expansion of Waterloo Docks. The telescopes were used to watch planetary bodies in order to calculate the exact time. This was needed for nautical navigation and was transferred to ships in the dock by the firing of the "one o'clock gun"; used for the last time in July 1969. In 1929 the Observatory and the Tidal Institute were amalgamated. Under the direction of Joseph Proudman, Arthur Doodson became the leading authority on tidal predictions. Bidston Observatory was deemed of national importance during the Second World War and predicted the tides for the D-Day landings amongst other things using a complex analogue computer.

Tour B: Exploring the Liverpool waterfront



Hartley's Albert Dock (1846)

The tour will start at Jesse Hartley's famous 1846 Albert Dock and look at some of the details of its architecture and history. We will then move on to the associated buildings such as the Traffic Office and Pump House before (provisionally) viewing the excavations looking for the remains of blitzed houses next to the Piermaster's House. Crossing the Albert Dock entrance to Mann Island we will arrive at the two Canning graving docks of 1769, superb examples of traditional masonry engineering. Options will include a tour of the *Edmund Gardner* pilot boat (not fully accessible for the disabled) and a more detailed examination of the dock furniture and gates, including the historic passage that led into the (original) Old Dock. Wet weather options will include visits to Merseyside Maritime Museum to see the new Sea Galleries exhibition and the Museum of Liverpool to look at the

transport based industrial archaeology themed galleries. At the Pierhead we will visit the 'Three Graces', consisting of the Royal Liver Building (1911), the Cunard Building (1916) and the Port of Liverpool Building (1907).

Tour C: Merseyside Aviation - Hooton Park and Speke



Belfast Trusses at Hooton Park

This tour will take us to two pioneering sites in the development of Merseyside aviation - Hooton Park and Speke Aerodrome, both listed Grade II*. At Hooton Park war in August 1914 saw the former horse racing venue requisitioned for military use, initially by the army, then by the RFC. The War Department built one single and three double aircraft hangars, which were completed in 1917. These hangars had a unique latticed timber roof construction - Belfast Trusses - originally used in the Belfast shipyards to cover large working areas, and which provided strength at low cost. One hundred years on, the hangars and their roofs are still there, having benefitted from a recent £350,000 restoration project.



Speke Aerodrome started scheduled flights to Manchester and London in 1930, but was not officially inaugurated until 1933. The focus of Merseyside aviation has now moved to John Lennon Airport but we will have a tour of Speke's art-deco control tower and terminal building, constructed between 1937 and 1939 and modelled on Hamburg's Fuhlsbüttel Airport. We will also see the small collection of aircraft with local associations on the concrete apron.

Terminal - Speke Aerodrome

Tour D: Bridges, Canals and Locks - Warrington and Runcorn



Warrington Transporter (1916)

In Warrington we will visit the only Transporter Bridge built to carry railway wagons. Now defunct, the Grade II* structure crosses the River Mersey at a point where industry has operated continuously since the 18th century. We will see the impressive Manchester Ship Canal and its locks and swing bridges, then visit the historic Bridgewater Canal at its terminus in Runcorn. A short walk along the towpath will take us to the remains of the ten-lock flight that Brindley built down to the River Mersey and see the ambitious plans for the link's restoration. Continuing on foot, we will pass close to the Ship Canal viewing the magnificent bridges across the Mersey - the 19th century railway viaduct, the 20th century steel arch bridge and the recently completed cable-stayed Mersey Gateway Crossing as well as the site of an earlier transporter bridge. This trip will include some walks of about 1km, good footwear and suitable clothing is recommended. Time and weather permitting, there will be an option to take a longer walk across the Silver Jubilee Bridge to Widnes for a brief visit to the remains of chemical works and the terminus of the canal and railway link to St Helens.

Tour E: The Ports and Industries of the Flintshire Coast



Bagillt port inlet

This tour explores the left bank of the River Dee which between Chester and Point of Ayr supported a surprising variety of past industries including shipbuilding, rope and chain making, steel production, lead smelting, coal mining, wire making, copper and brass working and cotton production. Starting at Connah's Quay, with its shipbuilding past, we will progress along the coast to view the remains of Bettisfield Colliery (1871) and the mouth of the amazing Milwr Tunnel, a 10 mile long drainage adit built in stages between 1897 and 1957 to serve the Halkyn lead mines. Close by, Greenfield Dock was once the terminus of the Holywell Limestone Company tramway emanating six miles away in the hills, dropping down 800 feet via nine inclines.



Lower Cotton Mill (c1750)

After lunch at Greenfield Valley Heritage Park we will visit the Wire Mill, one of the first in the Valley, before moving on to the Lower Cotton Mill, C1750 and originally six stories high. The mill warehouse houses a battery operated locomotive and stock from 400 feet below in the Milwr Tunnel. At Meadow Mill the 'Copper King' Thomas Williams had his first factory in the Valley. Our visit will end at Greenfield Mills, a complex of works including the battering hammers, whence came the nickname 'Battery Mills'. The tour will include walks of between one and two km, stout footwear and suitable clothing are recommended.



Sankey Viaduct (1830)

Tour F: St Helens - The first industrial canal and the first inter-city passenger railway in the country

We will visit Rainhill, where 'Rocket' won the famous locomotive trials in 1829. A view of the impressive skew bridge and a visit to the station will be included. Continuing the railway theme at Earlestown, we will walk under the Sankey Viaduct, arguably the first railway viaduct in the world. A walk of about 1.5 km will take us along the Sankey Canal visiting defunct locks and a stretch of the original 1857 canal still surviving 'in water'.



Cannington Shaw Bottle Shop (1886)

After lunch in St Helens, we will stroll along the canal tow path and see the Cannington Shaw Bottle Shop – a Scheduled Monument, the sole remains of a 19th century bottle making factory which claimed to be the largest in the country. Afterwards we will make a stop at the canal side site of a slitting mill, coal mines and copper works. This trip will include walks of one to two km. which may be on rough ground.

Tour G: “Behind the scenes” at the National Museums Store, a heritage bus tour of Birkenhead Docks and a Tram Museum visit

We will first visit the normally “out of bounds” back store for Liverpool Museums which houses objects as varied as full size locomotives and stage coaches. Our guide will be Sharon Brown, Curator of Land Transport, Work and Industry.



The “Alabama Dock”

We will then move to Birkenhead to the Transport Museum, a former stables, soft drinks factory and coffin makers where after a break we will transfer to a heritage bus from the Museum fleet. Our guide will be local history expert Rob Jones, who featured on *Great Railway Journeys*. Rob will accompany the bus to the Birkenhead Priory, one of the oldest buildings on Merseyside, where the viewing area affords excellent views of Cammell Laird’s shipyard and Liverpool. From there the bus will visit the Monument to the Mersey Tunnel, the Hamilton Square station building, the Cleveland Street tramcar factory of 1868 to 1902 and make a tour of the Birkenhead docks, where we will see one of the last Scherzer rolling lift bridges in the UK.



Wallasey No 78

On arrival back at the Transport Museum we will have a buffet lunch This will be followed by a special tram ride, probably on the 100 year old Wallasey tram No 78, plus guided tours of the museum.

Tour H: A walk across the sands to Hilbre Island



Hilbre Island

This unusual trip will see the group following the tide out from West Kirby across the sands to Hilbre Island, located in the mouth of the River Dee.

The island has a history dating back to prehistoric times and shell middens, flints, axes and arrowheads have been discovered. From later periods some Roman pottery has been unearthed as well as medieval post holes and a hearth probably associated with a dwelling. The buildings of chief interest were erected in Victorian times by the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board and Trinity House and include houses for the Telegraph Keeper and his assistant, the Telegraph building, the Buoy Master’s house and the Buoy Store itself. Also to be seen are the remains of the Lifeboat House dating from 1847. The incoming tide will limit visit time making this a busy tour. Return from the Wirral will be via the Mersey Ferry.



The Telegraph Station

Other key points: About 6km. of walking will be involved. The sand can be soft in places with slippery rocks. Walking boots or, ideally, wellington boots should be worn as shallow channels of water may be encountered. There are toilets in West Kirby and composting toilets on the island. A packed lunch will be provided but there are no shops, no fresh water and very little shelter. Waterproofs and warm clothing are recommended.

Tour I: National Waterways Museum, Ferry Landings and a Ferry Trip



National Waterways Museum

We will start at the National Waterways Museum at Ellesmere Port with a “behind the scenes” tour plus free time for private exploration. The museum is on the site of Netherpool, the largest inland waterway dock complex in the UK, at the outlet of the Ellesmere Canal. Designed and engineered by Messrs Jessop and Telford this was part of a project to connect the rivers Mersey, Dee and Severn.

The section between the Mersey at Netherpool and the Dee at Chester opened in 1795 but although it provided a valuable link to the Potteries the canal was not finished as intended and it never reached the Severn. As well as boats in extraordinary variety, the museum’s Power Hall displays a collection of historic internal combustion and steam engines, some in operation, while the

Archive illustrates the history of the canals, both locally and nationally.



Ferry Landing - Eastham

Ferries have plied the Mersey between points on the Wirral and Liverpool from at least the 12th century and the first steamship was operating by 1815. One early terminus was at Eastham where the old booking office is still in place and the Ferry Hotel will provide lunch. We will then move on to see what remains of the other Wirral termini, taking in New Ferry, Rock Ferry, Monk's Ferry, Woodside, Seacombe and, time permitting, Egremont and New Brighton. The tour will end with a ferry trip back to Liverpool.

There will be a fair amount of walking at the Boat Museum although to some degree visitors will be able to choose their own pace. At the other sites there will not be a lot of walking.

Tour X: Royal Liver Building 360° Tour (Tuesday evening visit)



Royal Liver Building

One of the iconic “Three Graces” on the Liverpool waterfront, when completed in 1911 the Royal Liver Building was Europe’s first skyscraper and one of the first buildings in the world to be built using reinforced concrete. At 322 feet tall to the top of the spires, and 167 feet to the main roof, this guided evening tour will cover construction of the building and provide stunning views of the Liverpool Docks, the city and the river. A glass of prosecco will round off a memorable experience.