

## Millom - Mill on the Hill

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### Millom - Mill on the Hill

The mines that once were at the centre of Millom working life, now protect local wildlife.

[Click here to listen to the locally recorded audio files and learn about Millom's rich history](#) [6]

## Iron Mining and Iron works

Originally a collection of small fishing villages and scattered farms with tiny local iron mines. But everything changed in 1855 when a huge deposit of high-grade iron ore, called hematite, was discovered on the coast at nearby Hodbarrow. The rapid growth of Millom was fuelled by the industrial revolution and new railways. By the early 1900's Millom had evolved into a thriving Victorian iron town with a population of over 10,000 people. In its hey-day, it was the largest industrial site of its kind in the world with an iron ore mine and an Iron works adjacent to each other.

Millom until the 1860's was known as Holburn Hill but then became known as Millom thought to be from 'Mill on the Hill' after the ironworks established.

Every family in Millom had members that worked at the iron works. The town was very cosmopolitan as miners came from all over the UK to find employment in the Hodbarrow iron ore mines and the nearby Millom Iron works. Many were from Cornwall where they had previously been employed in the tin mines.

In the first 50 years the Hodbarrow mines produced 13 million tonnes of iron ore.

The ready supply of ore also fuelled the West Cumbrian and Furness iron, steel and shipbuilding industries.

The highest quality ore was used in the production of jewellery but had to be shipped to Germany for polishing as no facilities existed in the UK at the time.

It was hard dirty work and the miners have since become known as the Red Men by some because of the colour of the iron ore which coated everything including the machinery and the miners.

There were 20 different shafts at the mines and Moorbank was the deepest at nearly 600ft (182.8m).

## **Three sea walls**

As the mines developed they began to encroach upon the coastline and it was necessary to build sea walls to keep water out of the workings. In all, three different walls were constructed each one enabling the mining to expand and take out more iron ore, the first one made from timber was soon replaced in 1890 by a concrete structure built with a lighthouse on top (the old lighthouse) which was finally replaced by the existing structure and new lighthouse which currently stands as an impressive monument to the engineers who built it in 1905.

The sea wall and lighthouse: one piece of the old mining industry which remains completely intact. The mining company built the lighthouse on Hodbarrow Point to guide ships to its dock.

The 'Sea Wall' - a.k.a. The Outer Barrier, is 1.3 miles long, 40 feet high and twice as wide.

## **Working by candlelight.**

In the early days of the mining operation the miners wore helmets which usually only lasted 2/3

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months before turning to pulp. On these helmets they would stick a piece of clay upon which to attach a lighted candle so they could work underground. The tunnels were not gaseous so there was no risk of explosions.

The iron works and the mine both had their own piers and mooring for ships which until the advent of the Furness railway were very busy shipping iron ore out around the world and bringing in various supplies to feed the two operations.

The mine had its own hospital facilities on site

There was a boat building company based at Borwick Rails and a Chandlers shop. **Rats as big as cats!**

The miners are thought to have encouraged the presence of “rats as big as cats” down the mines as they said that if the rats were seen to be leaving the mines it would be a sign of danger and allow the miners to get out also.

## **Protecting Nature**

The old mines are now protected as nature reserves

The sand dune habitat is particularly important for Natterjack toads

### **Hodbarrow Nature Reserve:**

The site is owned by the RSPB and designated a site of Special Scientific Interest. Also home to the Natterjack Toad. The reserve sits on the site of the former mine. It is one of the best places for wildlife, including chances to see the great crested grebe which was hunted almost to extinction in the UK for its ornate head plumes. They are now protected, and best seen at Hodbarrow in the spring when they display their courtship dance.

### **Millom Ironworks Local Nature Reserve:**

An important site for Tern species and a number of wading birds. Various birds of prey can be seen

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throughout the year. The lagoon is important for Little terns and other wildlife. The RSPB provides floating tern islands as an important for conservation measure.

Seals have also been seen at [Haverigg](#) [7]

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