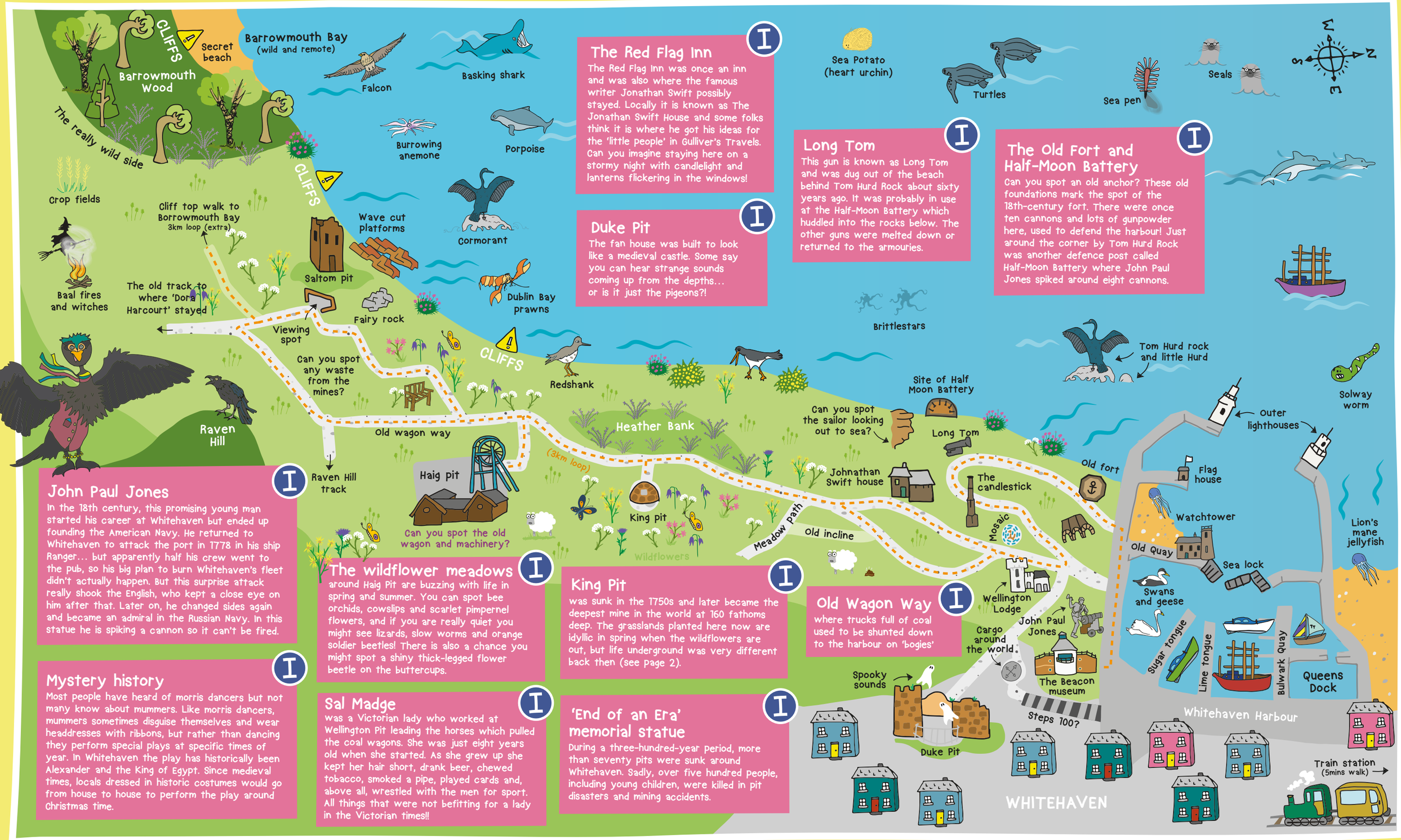
Whitehaven - The Cormorant's Tales



The Red Flag Inn

The Red Flag Inn was once an inn and was also where the famous writer Jonathan Swift possibly stayed. Locally it is known as The Jonathan Swift House and some folks think it is where he got his ideas for the 'little people' in Gulliver's Travels. Can you imagine staying here on a stormy night with candlelight and lanterns flickering in the windows!

Duke Pit

The fan house was built to look like a medieval castle. Some say you can hear strange sounds coming up from the depths... or is it just the pigeons?!

Long Tom

This gun is known as Long Tom and was dug out of the beach behind Tom Hurd Rock about sixty years ago. It was probably in use at the Half-Moon Battery which huddled into the rocks below. The other guns were melted down or returned to the armouries.

The Old Fort and Half-Moon Battery

Can you spot an old anchor? These old foundations mark the spot of the 18th-century fort. There were once ten cannons and lots of gunpowder here, used to defend the harbour! Just around the corner by Tom Hurd Rock was another defence post called Half-Moon Battery where John Paul Jones spiked around eight cannons.

John Paul Jones

In the 18th century, this promising young man started his career at Whitehaven but ended up founding the American Navy. He returned to Whitehaven to attack the port in 1778 in his ship Ranger... but apparently half his crew went to the pub, so his big plan to burn Whitehaven's fleet didn't actually happen. But this surprise attack really shook the English, who kept a close eye on him after that. Later on, he changed sides again and became an admiral in the Russian Navy. In this statue he is spiking a cannon so it can't be fired.

The wildflower meadows

around Haig Pit are buzzing with life in spring and summer. You can spot bee orchids, cowslips and scarlet pimpernel flowers, and if you are really quiet you might see lizards, slow worms and orange soldier beetles! There is also a chance you might spot a shiny thick-legged flower beetle on the buttercups.

King Pit

was sunk in the 1750s and later became the deepest mine in the world at 160 fathoms deep. The grasslands planted here now are idyllic in spring when the wildflowers are out, but life underground was very different back then (see page 2).

Old Wagon Way

where trucks full of coal used to be shunted down to the harbour on 'bogies'

Mystery history

Most people have heard of morris dancers but not many know about mummers. Like morris dancers, mummers sometimes disguise themselves and wear headdresses with ribbons, but rather than dancing they perform special plays at specific times of year. In Whitehaven the play has historically been Alexander and the King of Egypt. Since medieval times, locals dressed in historic costumes would go from house to house to perform the play around Christmas time.

Sal Madge

was a Victorian lady who worked at Wellington Pit leading the horses which pulled the coal wagons. She was just eight years old when she started. As she grew up she kept her hair short, drank beer, chewed tobacco, smoked a pipe, played cards and, above all, wrestled with the men for sport. All things that were not befitting for a lady in the Victorian times!!

'End of an Era' memorial statue

During a three-hundred-year period, more than seventy pits were sunk around Whitehaven. Sadly, over five hundred people, including young children, were killed in pit disasters and mining accidents.

Trail Safety Information
This coastal trail follows a well-marked footpath from Whitehaven to the cliffs above Saltom Pit. It is part of the famous Cumbria Coastal Way. There are steep, unstable cliffs off route, so please stick to the marked footpaths.

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