

Lancaster Civic Vision

Celebrating our Heritage – Enhancing our Environment – Shaping our Future

MORECAMBE – ALONG THE PROM

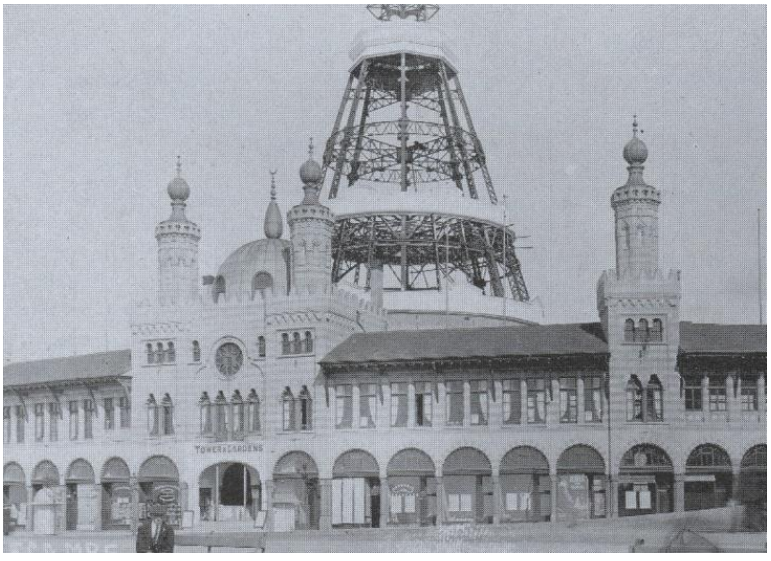
Lancaster Civic Vision Leaflet 12

A stroll along the Promenade is a lovely way to see any seaside town. This short walk – from Morecambe Town Hall to the Battery – is only 1½ miles (2km) long, completely level and traffic free.





Let's start at the Town Hall (for satnav use LA4 5AF). Built in 1932, Morecambe Borough Council (their coat-of-arms and the Town Hall are shown above) used the building until the merger with Lancaster in 1974. Morecambe Town Council has operated since 2009.



Morecambe Tower c1910

Next door, what is now Gala Bingo has previously been a bowling alley, cinema (Morecambe once had eight) and The Tower – proposed in 1898, two-thirds built on weak sandy foundations by 1902 (photographed here *c.*1910) and demolished in 1918. The rivalry with Blackpool is clear. The difficulty of finding long-term attractions for visitors is a feature of all resorts as fashions change.

Lord Street, which runs inland from the roundabout at Gala Bingo, leads you to Holy Trinity Church – noted for its stained glass by Shrigley & Hunt and Abbott of Lancaster – and the fishing village of Poulton-le-Sands, Morecambe's core. On the Promenade, the row of houses along the front from Lord Street were gentlemen's residences, built in 1825–47 behind a cobbled wall, an early sea defence.

As you walk along the Promenade, look out to sea. On a clear day, in the distance stretch the hills from Warton Crag west to Black Combe behind Barrow-in-Furness. Morecambe Bay is the largest inter-tidal area in the UK, and the Celtic words for 'big bay' became 'Morecambe' and that transferred officially to the town in 1889 and unofficially from the 1850s.

The Bay looks flat at low tide but it has deep channels and a large tidal range giving dangerously fast incoming tides. There are also major sandbanks in the Bay and mussel and cockle beds. You can still buy Morecambe Potted Shrimps; the arrival of the railway in 1848 helped their marketing nationally.

After the RNLI shop and just before the Clock Tower, opposite the junction with Clarence Street, the Promenade widens and this marks the start of the former Central Pier, which opened in 1869, closed in 1970 and was demolished in 1992.

The site now has a rust-coloured steel sculpture of the profile of the Cumbrian hills beyond. There was also West End Pier (by the Regent Road junction), over a mile long with steamers to Blackpool. It opened in 1896 and was wrecked by a storm in 1977.

Just past the Clock Tower (1904) you'll come to the statue of Eric Morecambe (né Bartholomew) unveiled by the Queen in 1999. Many catchphrases from Eric and Ernie's acts have been embedded in the paving.



Next on your left are the Winter Gardens / Victoria Pavillion (that is the spelling in the doorway). This is the extension (now Grade II*-listed) in 1897 to a bathing and ballroom complex next door (1878–1982), now replaced by Pleasureland amusement arcade. In its day, the Winter Gardens was a noted variety theatre.

The outside has been well conserved with its striking and elaborate russet-red terracotta and brick. The building closed in 1977 and a Friends group is seeking to secure its future. Do pop in if it is open for visitors. Just along the street are two white Art Deco shop fronts, formerly Littlewoods and Woolworths; and opposite them is Morecambe's War Memorial.

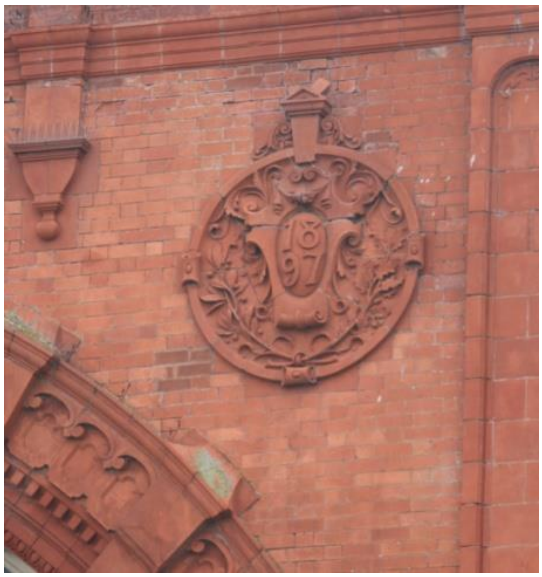
Now at our half-way point, we have reached the Stone Jetty, RNLI station, Midland Hotel and Promenade Station. They are described in more detail in the guide *Morecambe – the Station to the Sea.*

The Stone Jetty is worth a detour to the seaward end to enjoy the many bird-themed sculptures and carvings. The RNLI station uses a hovercraft because only this can cope with the Bay's sandbanks and channels at all states of the tide.

The Midland Hotel – an Art Deco jewel (1933) – is open again after a major restoration. Promenade Station (1907–94) is now the Visitor Information Centre and The Platform, an entertainment venue. The empty area next to the Midland Hotel, once the resort's Super Swimming Stadium, may become Eden North, a new tourist attraction.



Midland Hotel, seahorses



Winter Gardens, detail

Moving on, the area beyond Aldi supermarket, and now boarded up, used to be Frontierland with its funfair and rides. In 2020 the site awaits redevelopment. Along the Promenade you can see the huge limestone boulders of the sea defences (1989–2007) after the floods in 1977, 1983 and 1990. The severe flood in 1927 led to earlier defences along this coast.

Nearing the end of our walk, the five-storey, terraced houses along this stretch of Marine Road West remind us of the many small hotels, guest and boarding houses, bed-and-breakfasts and holiday flats that have been the mainstay of Morecambe's tourism.

The gardens between the Promenade and the road have been imaginatively reconstructed with large art works, new paths, fountains, replanting, play area and café.

The Battery, the end of our walk, has been extended seawards for additional coastal defence. The old theatre here has been replaced by flats with balcony views over the Bay. The Promenade carries on from here as far as Heysham or you can walk or get the bus (Nos 3, 4 or 5) back to the Town Hall.



Marine Road West

Reading:

Bingham RK 1990 *The Last Resort? The Flow and Ebb of Morecambe.* Milnthorpe: Cicerone Press

Text – Gordon Clark. Photographs – 'The Tower' from S. Ashworth & N. Dalziel *Lancaster and District in Old Photographs*. (1993); the others by Gordon Clark.

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