Lancaster Civic Vision

Celebrating our Heritage – Enhancing our Environment – Shaping our Future

SUNDERLAND POINT

Lancaster Civic Vision Guide 9



The view from Glasson to Lune Estuary, Sunderland Point and Irish Sea

There are few places in mainland Britain to which access depends on the tide. Sunderland village and Sunderland Point, near Lancaster, are among them. They are well worth a visit.

But the only road in and out is flooded at high tide and muddy at low tide. The road is narrow with only a few passing places. Care is needed. Do check the state of the tide in the local paper, in tide tables or at https://www.bbc.co.uk/weather/coast-and-sea/tide-tables, looking up 'Heysham'.

From the A683, follow the signs for Overton and then the minor road over the marshes to Sunderland Point. For satnav use LA3 3HR. Buses (No. 5) serve Overton but no further. Parking is available on the shingle by the public toilets.



Satellite image of Sunderland Point

Sunderland is a small settlement; only about 30 houses in two groups – First Terrace and Second Terrace – strung along the shoreline on the east side of the Heysham Peninsula.

The River Lune is to the east and Morecambe Bay and the Irish Sea to the west. The Lune has a small tidal bore that you might see during incoming, spring high tides.

Sunderland probably started around 1680 (Sunderland Hall dates from 1683) when a quay was licensed here for Lancaster ships to load and unload, so avoiding the complex navigation needed to get sailing ships up the twisting Lune at high or low tide whatever the wind direction.

This was the first attempt by Lancaster merchants at establishing an outport for the city. One of the merchants, Robert Lawson, started building houses and warehouses here around 1720 for the Irish, Baltic and West Indies trades of the city. The wharf was extended in 1723 as trade expanded.

Ten ships had been built here by 1730. Second Terrace was originally mostly warehouses while First Terrace had a smithy (No. 2), perhaps a Customs House (No. 3) and the Ship Inn (No. 11). Some Lune river pilots lived at Sunderland. However, the tidal road was a hindrance for the port and, when Lancaster's second outport at Glasson opened in 1787 on the other side of the estuary, the cargoes and ships left. There is a separate Guide in this series on *Glasson* (No. 8).



Second Terrace from First terrace

Around this time, sea bathing started to become fashionable and Sunderland reinvented itself as a resort with two inns and a bathing machine (for the discrete changing of clothing). Houses 13, 14, 16 and 17 on Second Terrace show signs of having been converted from redundant warehouses to sea-bathing houses.

However, other resorts proved more fashionable and had more attractions, and by around 1840 this trade had diminished greatly. Blackpool and Morecambe were taking over. There are two guides in this series on Morecambe's tourist areas (Nos 12 and 13).

The farmers still grazed the fields to the west of the village. The fishermen caught fish with haaf or drift nets and harvested mussels from Morecambe Bay. The wildfowlers hunted ducks on the marshes. Today most of the residents either work elsewhere in the locality or are retired.



Old Hall

West of the village a track leads to an eighteenth-century building called the Summerhouse but perhaps originally a look-out point for ships. The track then leads to

what is traditionally known as Sambo's Grave. He is said to have been a black boy brought here as a servant by a West Indies ship captain, one of around 40 people of African origin living locally. He died here in 1736 and was buried on the west of the peninsula. The grave is still tended. The Reverend James Watson's verse of 1796 tells us that "Then the GREAT JUDGE his approbation founds / Not on MAN'S COLOR but his WORTH OF HEART". By this time the debate on the abolition of slavery was being contested nationally and in Lancaster.

Many of the houses here are Grade II listed and this is a Conservation Area. Being so low-lying, flooding from the Lune and/or the sea is a real danger and flood-resilience measures and evacuation plans have recently been put in place.

You can stroll from the village past Old Hall to Sunderland Point itself, then along the western shore and back by the track (The Lane) across the peninsula to the village. You will pass the Mission Church (1894 by Paley and Austin the noted Lancaster architects). The area attracts bird watchers and photographers and, since the late nineteenth century, artists.



Upsteps Cottage and The Lane to Sambo's Grave

Today there is an active Community Association and a recently established Friends of Sunderland Point that aims to improve local facilities and protect the shoreline.



Reading
H. Cunliffe 1989 *The Story of Sunderland Point*.
Text and photographs (except satellite image from Google Earth) – Gordon Clark.
Published by Lancaster Civic Vision (©2014; revised 2025).
Lancaster Civic Vision is the trading name of Lancaster Civic Society, registered charity no. 258434