A deep fondness for Holy Island (Ynys Gybi), Anglesey, is a common experience. You are invited both to fall under the spell of this exceptional area, and also to share concerns for its future. It is rugged and delightful by turns. There are places in the world more exposed to the battering of wind and storms than Holy Island. However, the character and undoubted attraction of this small island; the north western outpost of the proud and ancient Celtic country of Wales, to the west of its powerful neighbour, England; owes much to its climate and to the effects over millennia of the Irish Sea. It is an island of cliffs and beaches, of rock outcrops and development; at the same time a busy international port and a linguistic mixture. The phenomenon of change, in an area that is itself implicitly synonymous with the notion of landscape, will be examined. This chapter is based on long knowledge of the area and also draws on experience gained during the development of the European methodology for determining generic landscape character in England, and LANDMAP (note the central ‘D’), the specialist landscape information system for Wales.

This chapter examines the important status of landscape in the contemporary life of this 20 square kilometre island of Holy Island (Ynys Gybi in the Welsh language). The island is of international importance for its ancient and complex geology, has a diverse and significant ecology, nationally recognised scenic beauty, a dynamic history over the last two centuries, a diverse social landscape, and a varied but vulnerable economy.

Over-flying the island from the south-east, one sees a swathe of green, gorse-decked fields, sparkling, metamorphosed grey rock outcrops and mainly white-painted houses, bungalows and caravans, especially around the island’s narrow waist. To the north lie three distinct features: the port town of Holyhead, with its two kilometre breakwater; a rugged coastal eminence with a massive quartzite quarry; and the high, contorted cliffs at the extreme north-west of the island. One also notices the three umbilical cords that link the island to the main Isle of Anglesey, known as the Mother of Wales.