During the 18th century several efforts were made to clear the channel from Dublin Bay to allow free movement of shipping into Dublin Port. The great south wall was built to the south of Dublin Bay at Rigsend. But impressive as it is, the great south wall didn’t clear the sand from the mouth of the Liffey. Enter Captain William Bligh, famous for being thrown off his ship The HMS Bounty in the south Pacific. In 1800, 13 years after the mutiny, he was sent to Dublin to conduct the first detailed survey of the bay, and to suggest ways of improving it. Bligh believed that the south wall was only part of the solution.

He proposed building a second wall from the northern shore, in an effort to further concentrate the flow of the Liffey. Squeezing out between the two walls, the river would dig into the bed and cast the sand and mud out into the bay. The construction of the Bull Wall began in 1819 and was completed in five years.

The north bull wall, and the tidal scour that it produced, was a remarkable success. The force of the water pulled the mud out into the bay from the river’s mouth, increasing the depth at low water from 6 to 16 feet. Finally, ships could get into the port at all stages of the tide.

But the North Bull Wall would do far more than open up the port. In the greatest accident that ever happened in Dublin, Bligh’s wall created an island behind it - the Bull Island. The steady stream of mud and sand carried by the Liffey waters - which previously had moved out into the bay - was now deposited on the bay’s northern shores, just behind the North Bull Wall. And so grew the Bull Island, where both Royal Dublin Golf Club and St Anne’s Golf Club are resident.

The Bull Island Nature Reserve at present is 5km long and 800m wide, and the area above high tide is about 300 hectares. It contains a wide range of natural habitats, which include intertidal mudflats, salt marsh, freshwater marsh, dunes, and beach area.

The mudflats support a large population of birds, at any time up to 27,000 birds are present, which gives the area the highest bird density in Ireland. Many of the birds are migratory and these wild fowl and waders visit the island in such numbers that they bestow on the island an importance recognised internationally. Examples of some commonly found species are:- Brent Geese, Curlew, Widgeon, Grey Plover, Knots, Redshank, Bar-tailed Godwits, Shoveler, Oyster Catchers, Shelduck and Dunlins.

As well as bird life, the island’s habitats support a varying range of flora and fauna. For example, the fresh water marsh is important for its wealth of wild flowers, particularly orchids, and a group of Alnus glutinosa.

The island also provides the only Irish example of an undisturbed sequence of plant communities, from salt marsh to dune vegetation.

The Bull Island Nature Reserve is protected under the 1930 Wildlife Act, 1976 Wildlife Act, the 1906 Open Space act and it was declared a Biosphere reserve by Unesco in 1981. The island was designated a National Nature Reserve in 1988.

The Interpretative Centre is located adjacent to the roundabout near the centre of the island. Its purpose is to facilitate the use of the island in the broadest possible sense for the interpretation of its unique environment for the general public. In this context the centre has educational, recreational and conservational functions.