

# Fenit – Little Samphire Lighthouse

Since 1854 Little Samphire Island Lighthouse (An Fhianait Teach Solais) has served as a navigation light for Tralee Bay.

Construction began around 1848 in famine times with materials transported by boat from the mainland.

Lightkeepers manned the station for more than a hundred years from 1854 to 1956. While automated in 1954 a keeper remained in residence until 1956 after which the lighthouse was serviced from the mainland.

Although navigation technology has reduced its relevance, Little Samphire Island Lighthouse still serves as a navigation beckon to this day.

Data Sources Local knowledge and Tony McGrath, Blog at [ReadingTheSigns.weebly.com](http://ReadingTheSigns.weebly.com)

How Big is a Lighthouse Light Bulb 06/08/2015. Accessed at:

<https://readingthesigns.weebly.com/blog/how-big-is-a-lighthouse-light-bulb>



# Lighthouse Infrastructure

This light tower is 12 metre (39 feet) high.<sup>1</sup> The light is approximately 17 meters about high tidal levels.

The stone tower is attached to a compact dormer lodge with a ground and upper floor.

The island infrastructure includes outhouses for mechanical and homestead purposes. Walled areas subdivide the grounds, with the outer perimeter wall protecting the infrastructure from the sea.

The island grounds span 0.67 hectares or 1.65 acres.<sup>2</sup>

Sources:

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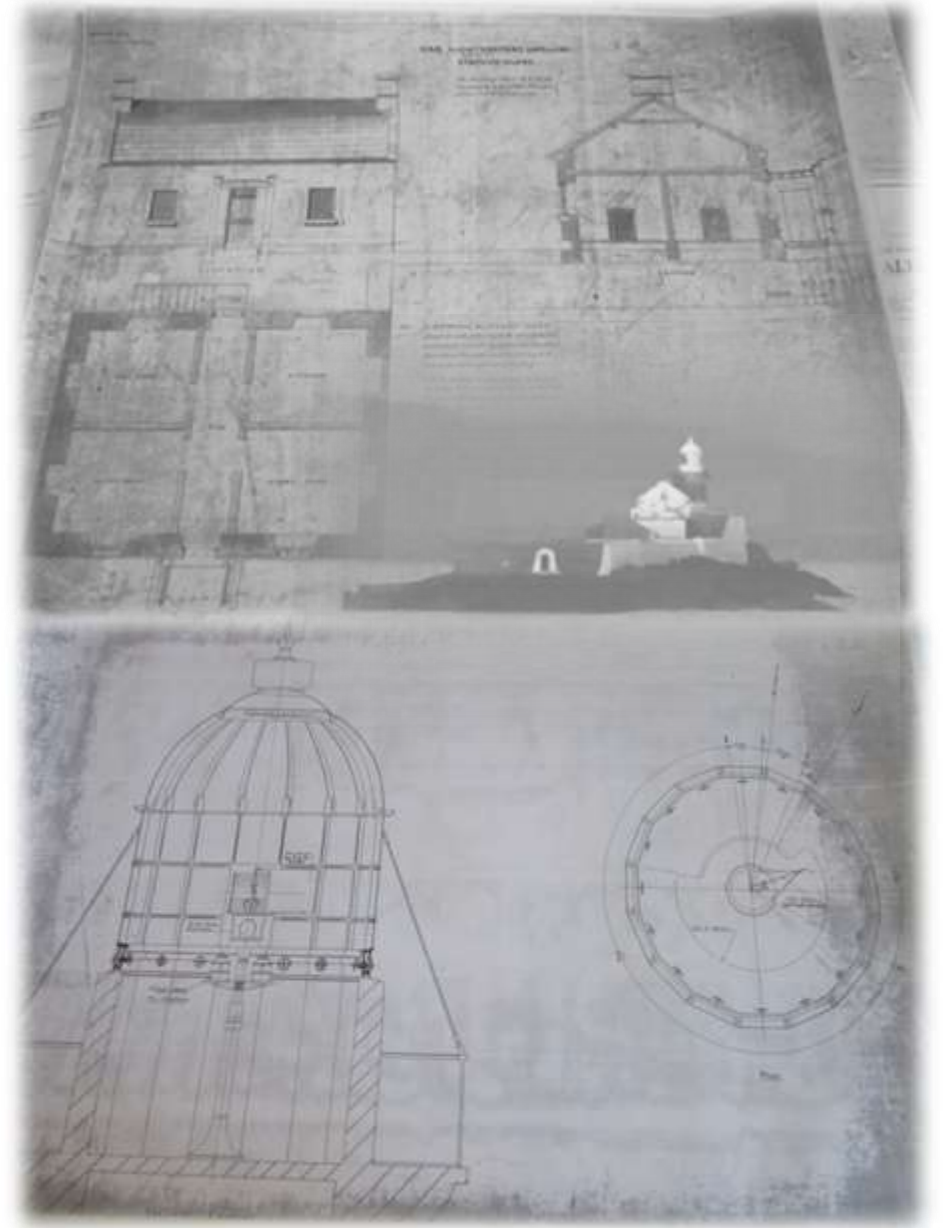
<https://readingthesigns.weebly.com/blog/how-big-is-a-lighthouse-light-bulb>

<sup>1</sup>Worldwide Lighthouses, Little Samphire Island Lighthouse, Accessed at:

<http://www.worldwidelighthouses.com/Lighthouses/Irish-Lighthouses/Commision-Irish-Lights/Little-Samphire-Island>

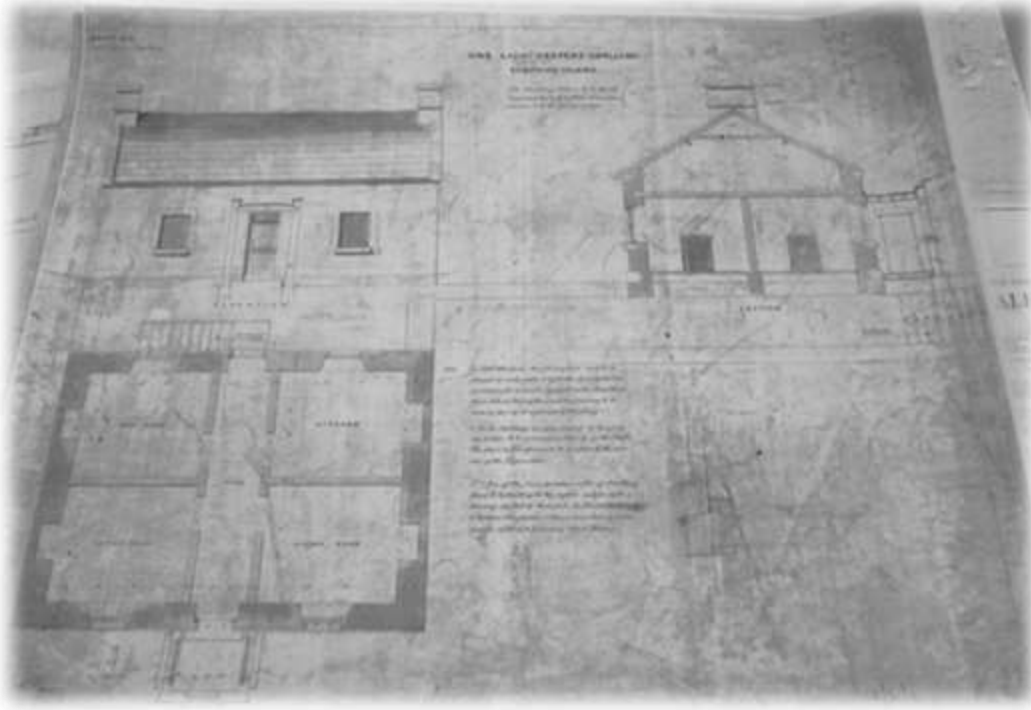
<sup>2</sup>Townlands.ie - Samphire Island Little, Townland, County Kerry. Accessed at:

<https://www.townlands.ie/en/kerry/trughanacmy/fenit/ballynahaglish/samphire-island-little/>



# Living Quarters

The compact keepers lodge was designed with ground and dormer floor. Windows at all sides, with a small front door porch facing Tralee Bay for shelter. No doubt the fireplaces provided much needed heat and comfort to the light keepers of Little Samphire.



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## Twin Islands

Fenit lighthouse was built on Little Samphire Rock. This is the flatter of two twin islands.

Fenit port and harbour are located on Great Samphire Rock, the higher island. The twin islands are approximately 0.75 of a mile (1.2 km) apart.

Both islands owe their names to the small coastal plant Rock Samphire.



## The Lighthouse - A View from Above



Aerial View - Source GeoHive:  
<http://map.geohive.ie>



# Mariner's Beacons & Lighthouses - Ireland's 1,000 Year History



For over 1,000 years bonfires or braziers (metal baskets) have been lit on Irish headlands as beacons for mariners.<sup>1 & 2</sup> Day-light beacons, in the form of rock mounds or towers have also been used.

Eask Tower in Dingle from the early eighteen hundred's is an example of a daylight beacon. The tower with its extended wooden arm signaled sea farers to let down their sails to round the mouth of the harbour.<sup>3</sup>

Given Ireland's position as Europe's western most navigation outpost, Irish mariners aids have traditionally had immense international importance. Lighthouses are neutral even in war, pledged only to save life, to guide ships.<sup>4</sup>

Data Sources:

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.irishlights.ie/who-we-are/our-history.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.greatlighthouses.com/stories/the-history-of-the-lighthouse/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.discoverireland.ie/Arts-Culture-Heritage/eask-tower-and-hill/49002>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.rte.ie/archives/2014/0926/648263-irelands-lighthouses/>

# Powering the Light Tower

Mariner's beacons have used many fuels, including wood, coal, oil (including whale oil), gas, paraffin, diesel, electricity and solar.<sup>1</sup>

At the time of first light at Little Samphire Lighthouse in 1854 lamp fuel was typically in the form of kerosene (paraffin)<sup>2</sup> By 1865 coal gas were extensively used to fuel lamps<sup>1</sup> with automation powered by gas (Acetylene) recorded at Little Samphire Lighthouse.<sup>2</sup> 1976 saw electrification via generator. The light was powered by battery charged by a Lister Diesel Charger.<sup>1</sup> Underwater or overhead electrical cable was never connected to Little Samphire Island. In 2013 solar panels<sup>3</sup> were installed, but a generator still serves the house and plant room.

In terms of water supply, from 1854 to Present the fresh water supply is via rainwater harvesting (and has to be checked for saltwater contamination).<sup>1</sup>



## Data Sources:

<sup>1</sup> Tag, Thomas, Lighthouse Lamps Through Time, United States Lighthouse Society. Accessed at <https://uslhs.org/lighthouse-lamps-through-time>

<sup>2</sup> Worldwide Lighthouses – Little Samphire Island Lighthouse 2011 <http://www.worldwidelighthouses.com/Lighthouses/Irish-Lighthouses/Commission-Irish-Lights/Little-Samphire-Island>

Photo Credit Boiler Room - Photo permissions: Tony McGrath, Blog at [ReadingTheSigns.weebly.com](http://ReadingTheSigns.weebly.com) How Big is a Lighthouse Light Bulb 06/08/2015. Accessed at: <https://readingthesigns.weebly.com/blog/how-big-is-a-lighthouse-light-bulb>

<sup>3</sup> O'Reilly, Roger. Lighthouses of Ireland – an illustrated guide to the sentinels that guard our coastline. The Collins Press, 2018.

# The Light Tower & Staircase

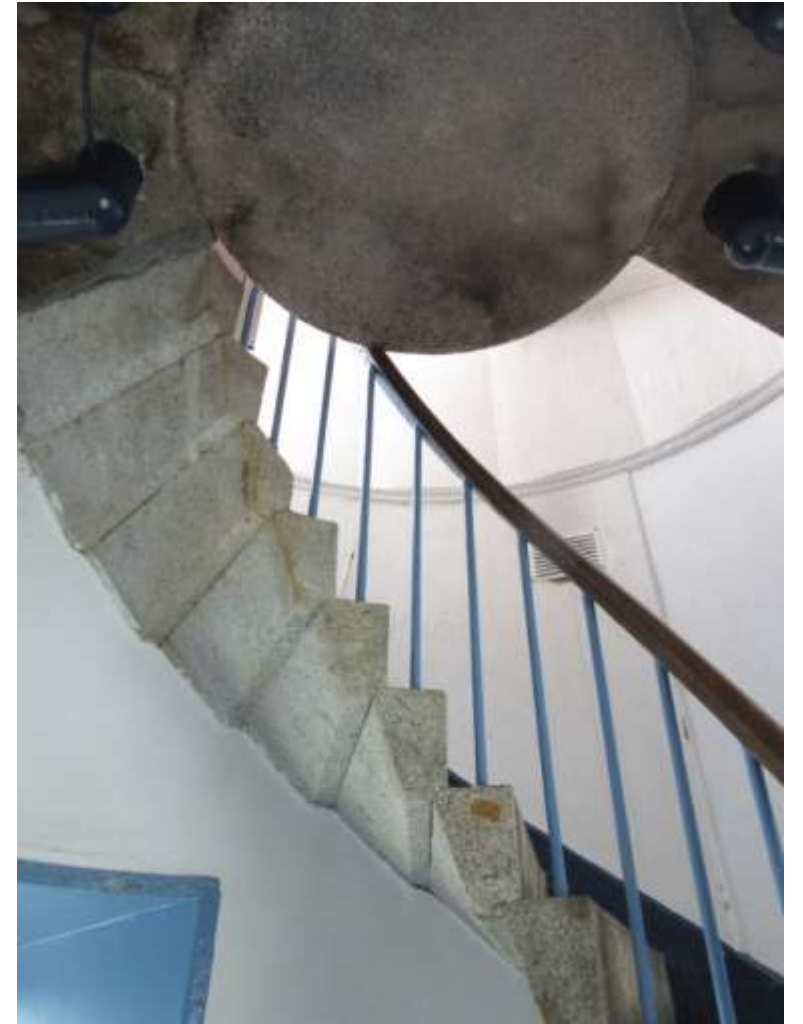


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# Character of the Light

It wasn't until the seventeen hundred's that lighthouse lights adopted regular light intervals with every lighthouse having its own distinguishing rhythm.

The character of the Little Samphire Lighthouse light is the flashing of white, red and green every 5.0 seconds<sup>1</sup>

Flash	1.0 seconds	Sectors	
Dark	4.0 seconds	Red	$262^{\circ} - 275^{\circ} = 13^{\circ}$
Total Period	5.0 seconds	Obs	$275^{\circ} - 280^{\circ} = 5^{\circ}$
		Red	$280^{\circ} - 090^{\circ} = 170^{\circ}$
		Green	$090^{\circ} - 140^{\circ} = 50^{\circ}$
		White	$140^{\circ} - 152^{\circ} = 12^{\circ}$
Latitude: 52° 16' N		Red	$152^{\circ} - 172^{\circ} = 20^{\circ}$
Longitude 09° 53' W		Obs	$172^{\circ} - 262^{\circ} = 90^{\circ}$

Data source:

<sup>1</sup>Worldwide Lighthouses – Little Samphire Island Lighthouse 2011

<http://www.worldwidelighthouses.com/Lighthouses/Irish-Lighthouses/Commission-Irish-Lights/Little-Samphire-Island>

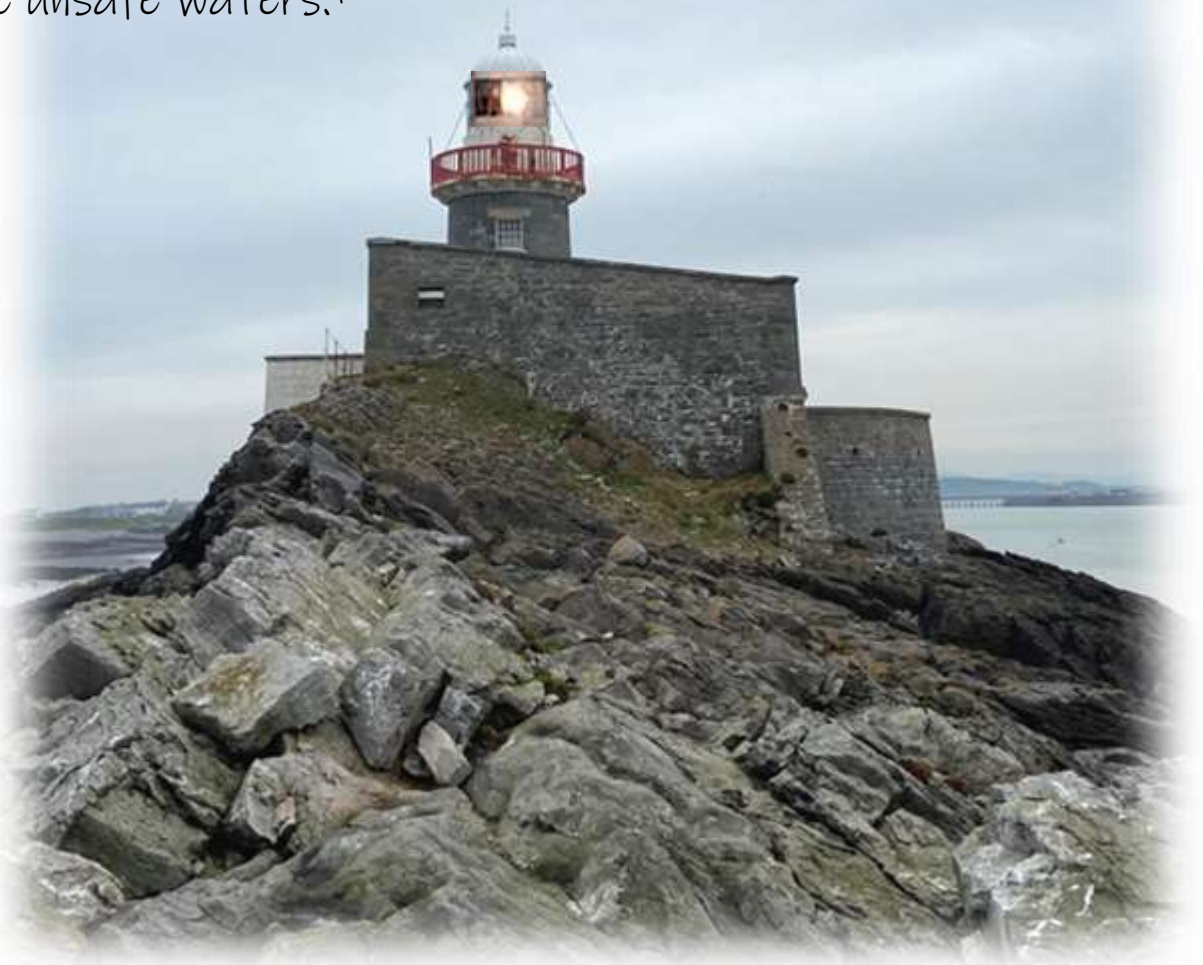
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## Light Tower, Gallery & Walkway

The white light sector denotes safe passage to vessels and is visible for 16 nautical miles. To vessels, the red & green light sectors denote unsafe waters.<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Data source: Worldwide Lighthouses – Little Samphire Island Lighthouse 2011

<http://www.worldwidelighthouses.com/Lighthouses/Irish-Lighthouses/Commision-Irish-Lights/Little-Samphire-Island>

View from the  
Light Tower





# Residents of Samphire Lighthouse

Over the years many lighthouse keepers and their families have called Fenit Lighthouse home.

The address:

House 1 Samphire Little,  
Ballynahaglish, Co. Kerry



According to census records in 1901 a lightkeeper his wife and seven children called the Fenit Lighthouse home. In 1911, a lightkeeper, his wife the assistant keeper, and their teenage daughter called the lighthouse home. Lightkeepers moved around frequently originating from various parts of Ireland.

In addition to the lightkeeper and assistant lightkeeper, an attendant was employed to deliver provisions, post and other support to the station via boat from the mainland. A strong link between lighthouse and community existed. This history is invaluable and hopefully will be preserved by communities around Ireland including Fenit.

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Little Samphire Island Lighthouse is largely intact as built over 150 years ago – A tribute to its construction during famine times



## Shipwreck Survivors: Stories of Little Samphire Lighthouse

In 1877, the crew of a shipwrecked sailing vessel were safely landed by Little Samphire Lighthouse keeper Mr W.G. Kennedy. The two-mast Schooner was driven ashore by heavy seas near Barrow. When the shipwreck was inevitable, the captain and crew took to their boats and in the dark of night and in heavy seas they made the long pull against head winds to reach the lighthouse. No doubt the lighthouse was a saving beacon, and after 2am the men neared Little Samphire Island in an exhausted state. They were safely landed by the lightkeeper, and he and his family sheltered the shipwreck survivors.





## Visiting the Lighthouse Grounds & Structures

During summer months boat trips to the lighthouse are available via the Fenit Harbour Office.

Trips are dependent on weather, sea and other conditions.

Trips involve an approximate 15 minute boat trip, and time on the island to see the grounds, light tower and keepers lodge.



## Kayaking to the Island

When the sea is calm, kayaking to the lighthouse and around Little Samphire Rock is idyllic. At low tide you can stay close to the shoreline for most of the adventure. A small sandy area on the mainland side of the island provides easy docking for a canoe. Always follow water safety sense.





## Is it a myth or can you walk to Little Samphire Rock at low tide?

Walking to the Lighthouse (with a little wading) is possible on rare occasions!

For example, on April 9<sup>th</sup> 2020 the lowest tide since recording began was experienced in Fenit (-0.04 meters). Atmospheric pressure at the time contributed to a lower tide than the annual tidal guides had forecasted. A large static high pressure weather system dominated at the time. High pressure pushes down on the ocean and this has the effect of lowering the tide. This happened to coincide with an enormous spring tide when the moon and the sun are aligned and the gravitational pull on the earth's oceans is much greater than usual. Both effects combined to give Fenit it's lowest astronomical tide (LAT) ever recorded. This made it possible to wade out to the lighthouse.<sup>1</sup>

Source: <sup>1</sup> Micheál Pierse, Fenit, 2020





# Rock Samphire

## Where the Islands Got their Name

Latin name: *Crithmum Maritimum*

Irish name: Craobhraic<sup>1</sup>

Family: *Apiaceae*

Rock Samphire is a wild green perennial vegetable, in the carrot family, found in coastal environments.<sup>2</sup>

Rock Samphire can be eaten raw or cooked, and can be found growing in abundance on the Fenit coastline.

The common English name Samphire is thought to be derived from the French word 'sampièr' or 'herbe de Saint Pierre'.<sup>2</sup> and <sup>3</sup> It is said to be named after the patron saint of mariners given its use by sailors to ward off scurvy with purportedly 30 times the vitamin C of an orange.<sup>3</sup>

Sources:

<sup>1</sup>Devlin, Zoë 2008 – 2020. Wildflowers of Ireland, Information on Rock Samphire. Accessed at: [http://www.wildflowersofireland.net/plant\\_detail.php?id\\_flower=227&wildflower=Samphire,%20Rock](http://www.wildflowersofireland.net/plant_detail.php?id_flower=227&wildflower=Samphire,%20Rock)

<sup>2</sup>The Sunday Times, Nature Notes - A Pleasing Plant, August 13, 2018. Accessed at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/nature-notes-7hr9sbsjs>

<sup>3</sup>Produce Business UK, Foraged rock samphire is back in fashion on UK restaurant and supermarket scenes. Accessed at: <https://www.producebusinessuk.com/supply/stories/2015/09/04/foraged-rock-samphire-is-back-in-fashion>



# Ná Fág Ach Lorg Coise

## Leave Only Your Footprints

Extract from:  
Fenit – A Walk in the Wild Place

Author Trisha O'Halloran, Fenit, 2020

Photos and art by Trisha unless otherwise cited

