

Fenit & Surrounds: The Three Castles, the Old Village & More

While Fenit Island Square Castle and Barrow Harbour Round Castle dominate the landscape, a lesser known third castle once existed!

The third castle, Tawlaght Castle was east on the mainland in Tawlaght townland, near Chapeltown. Nothing stands of this castle today.

Fenit Castle was owned by the FitzMaurices, Barrons of Kerry, while Tawlaght and Barrow were owned by the Earls of Desmond.



¹ Source: King, Jeremiah King, 'County Kerry Past and Present' Accessed at: http://www.askaboutireland.ie/aai-files/assets/ebooks/80_County-Kerry-Past-and-Present/80%20County%20Kerry%20Past%20and%20Present.pdf



Fenit Castle

Views from Fenit Village, Fenit Island
shoreline, Churchill and Barrow

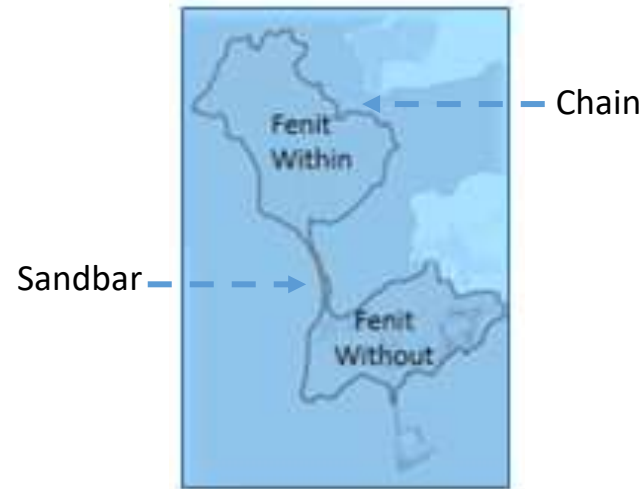


When exploring be mindful to check for right-of-ways or seek landowners permission and respect private lands.

Fenit 'Within' & 'Without' and the Metal Chain!

'Fenit Without' is the full name of the mainland peninsular village.

'Fenit Within' the island area, historically with walled and sea protection.¹



Protection from seaborne attackers took the form of a metal chain which stretched across Barrow Harbour from the Fenit to Barrow Castle locations. Divers have looked for remnants of the chain but nothing has been found to date.² During medieval times such chains could be attached to a tower with a mechanism to allow the rising or lowering of a chain, thereby giving or restricting access. A chain could be below the water surface or could be made to float with rafts, logs and other materials.³

Data Sources:

¹eOceanic , Barrow Harbour

https://eoceanic.com/sailing/harbours/215/barrow_harbour#:~:text=About%20Barrow%20Harbour&text=Three%20castles%20have%20stood%20here%3B%20the%20round%20tower%20of%20Barrow,narrow%20entrance%20to%20Barrow%20Harbour.

²McCarthy, James & Catherine, Fenit Spa - A Journey Through Time – The Sequel. Digimac Video Productions, 2016 Edition.

³Wikipedia, Boom Navigation Barrier, Accessed at:
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boom_\(navigational_barrier\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boom_(navigational_barrier))



Barrow Round Castle





Castle View

The view of Fenit castle
from the window of
Barrow Castle



Geoffrey the Barrow Castle Ghost!



Now it is said there is a ghost of Barrow Round Castle! It is the ghost of Geoffrey deClahuill thought to be the original 14th century inhabitant and Sheriff of Kerry. It is believed that the moans of the ghost can be heard when golf balls go astray toward the sea! ¹ From Barrow Castle the ghost had a good view of Tralee Golf Course even when it was on Fenit Island in the late 1890's! Nothing remains of the golf course on Fenit Island today, but the friendly ghost may still be around!



Wooden beams of the 1867 Brigantine E.L. Lydiard shipwreck nearby on Banna Beach

Clusters of Early Medieval Ringforts & Enclosures

Adjacent to the Tralee-Fenit road are sites of medieval ringforts and enclosures! For example, look to the right just before you enter Fenit village to see the Lisdooneen Ringfort. It is also visible from Fenit pier.*

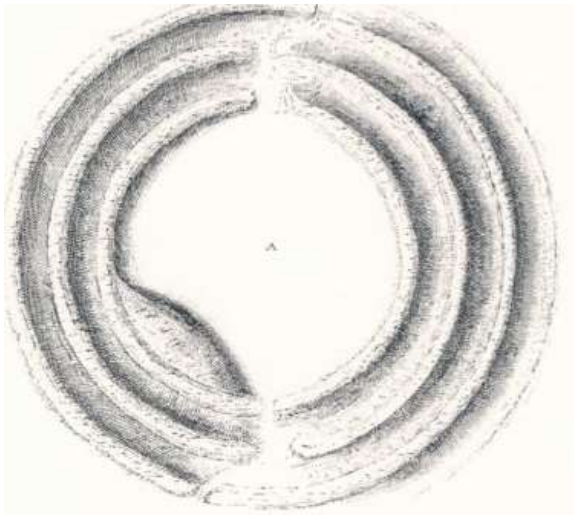
There are a phenomenal thirty-seven [in the studied greenway area] between Tralee and Fenit...[with] clusters of ringforts in several townlands, particularly Ballymakegoge, Knockanush East, Ballygarran and Tawlaght.¹

¹ Dunne, Laurence Archaeology, MIAI, 2018,
<http://www.traleefenitgreenway.com/history/archaeology/>

* Always respect private lands. Enjoy a view of the ringfort from Fenit pier.



Lisdooneen Ringfort



Royals & Fairies

Lisaenigambearuin Ringfort at Barrow may have been a royal site and a fort of assemblies of a sub-kingdom.¹

The ringfort is a tri-vallate structure meaning it has three banks and ditches overlooking Barrow Harbour & Fenit Island.¹

It is generally accepted that the more banks and ditches a monument has the higher the status.

The entrance to the Barrow field monuments is still referred to locally as the Royal Gate.¹

While it may have been a royal site of the Ciarraighe in history, it may well be a fairy fort to this day!

¹O'Connor, Mary. "When Battle's Done – Barrow, Spa, Fenit, and Hinterlands. The Kerryman Ltd, Tralee, 1996.

Tri Vallate Ringfort Visual Adapted from 'Sections of a Tri Vallate Ringfort' Thomas Wright, 1748 (Public Domain)



dúchas.ie

National Folklore Collection

Strange stones in this Locality.
8-6-'38.

There is a big stone near Barrow castle. It is about six tons weight and the print of five fingers are on it. It is said that a giant threw it from Caherconree and it came to the (ground) ground there. It is said to be seen yet and the print of the five fingers are in it also.

ARCHIVAL REFERENCE

Strange Stones in this Locality, June 1938 (Barrow, Co. Kerry)

The Schools' Collection, Vol. 0438, Page 164

Teacher: ML Ó hUallacháin



Fingerprints of a Giant & Vikings Rings!

Near Barrow Castle is a huge rock of about six tons reported to have the fingerprints of a giant!

It is said the giant through the rock from Fort of Cú Roí (Caherconree) and it landed by the castle in Barrow.¹ Caherconree is one of the oldest place names to be found in the traditional literature of Ireland and the fort there is reportedly one of the three oldest buildings in the land.²

While legends abound, the area history also includes confirmed Viking visitors! A Viking arm and neck ring were found in Fenit in the 19th century. Viking remains were also found on the nearby island of Illauntannig.³

¹ Strange Stones in the Locality Story from 1938. National Folklore Collection materials from the archive of Bridie Brassil, local folklorist.

² Goldbaum, Howard. Caherconree Pomontory Fort' Accessed online <https://voicesfromthedawn.com/caherconree/>

³ Viking details from Malachy Walsh & Partners, Underwater Archaeological Impact Assessment, Proposed Dumpsite, Tralee Bay, Co. Kerry. http://www.epa.ie/licences/lic_eDMS/090151b28052b2b0.pdf

*Image just a visual created based on the story recounted in the folklore.

Smugglers Quay & Hidden Treasure

In the 18th century the Fenit Barrow area was infamous for smuggling. An old quay by a small fishing village near Barrow House saw the landing of large quantities of smuggled goods. The quay was known as the Randy. It is thought to be named from the French word to rendezvous.¹ Stories of smugglers caves and tunnels are part of the rich folklore of the area.

It is also said that a bag of smugglers gold was buried by Sammy's Rock at Kilfinora by two sailors who stole the gold while their captain was in Tralee.² If these stories seems farfetched you only have delve into the archives to learn a bar of gold was indeed found near Tawlaght in 1938 (according to records of the Irish Folklore Commission).³ Local records indicate the gold was about 6 inches long and about one inch thick. Some say it was lost by smugglers, others say it was likely washed ashore from a shipwreck and brought to the field where it was found when seaweed was collected and spread as manure. The bar of gold was sold by the finder to a local jewellers for 7/6.⁴ No doubt the origin and stories behind the gold would be fascinating if known!

¹O'Connor, Mary. "When Battle's Done – Barrow, Spa, Fenit, and Hinterlands. The Kerryman Ltd, Tralee, 1996.

² Hidden Treasure, story heard from Mrs Eugene Parker, Listrim, Spa, Tralee (From Bridie Brassil, local folklorist)

³ Wilkins, N.P. 1989. Ponds, Passes and Parks, Aquaculture in Victorian Ireland, Glendale Press, Dublin. (Referenced in Underwater Archaeological Impact Assessment, Proposed Dumpsite, Tralee Bay. Laurence Dunne Archaeology 2014.

⁴ Fenit Castle - Primary Schools Project, 1937. Old transcript provided by local folklorist Bridie Brassil.



Plague Mass-burial Place

Tamlacht is a placename term which denotes a mass-burial pit or plague pit.

There is only one known site in Kerry.¹ The site is in the townland of Tawlaght West adjacent to Fenit.²

The placename comes from an era when plagues and epidemics ravaged medieval Ireland.¹

In more recent times, Fenit Port prepared for an outbreak of plague in the early 1900's (the Black Death). It is reported that construction was started on a controversial 'shed' which was given the title intercepting hospital. Thankfully the outbreak passed with only the foundation completed.³

In 2020, the COVID19 outbreak reminded us of the impact of plagues, epidemics and pandemics. Our hearts are with all those touched by illness and passing, and our gratitude to all essential services.



¹Tamlachta: The Map of Plague Burials and Some Implications for Early Irish History Author(s): Gene C. Haley Source: Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium, Vol. 22 (2002), pp. 96-140 Published by: Department of Celtic Languages & Literatures, Harvard University Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40285165> Accessed: 24-04-2020 11:41 UTC

² Mac Cotter, Paul, Historian, Dingle History. Accessed: <https://dinglehistory.com/dingle-single-event/?id=48>

³ 1900: Ireland's Last Bubonic Plague Scare

<https://irishhistorypodcast.ie/ireland-and-the-black-death-of-1900/>

Building towards the release of my book on the [Black Death – 1348: A Medieval Apocalypse](#) on May 2nd 2016 this article look at the last time plague threatened Ireland.

Barrow Bridge Banshee

It is told that a Banshee was known to have appeared by Barrow Harbour. The story recounts the appearance of a Banshee standing on Barrow Bridge her long black coat flapping in the wind and hair a strewn.¹ Next time you pass Barrow Bridge listen for the howling wind and you just might hear the Banshee!



¹O'Connor, Mary. "When Battle's Done – Barrow, Spa, Fenit, and Hinterlands. The Kerryman Ltd, Tralee, 1996.

The Fenit Mermaid

At the end of Fenit pier is a statue of a mermaid, a mythical sea creature with the head and upper body of a woman and the tail of a fish. Mermaids are sometimes described as "shape-shifting creatures that live as seals while in the sea, and transform into humans while on land."¹ Local oral folklore reports not only the sighting of mermaids in Barrow Harbour (by West Tawlaght behind Fenit Island), but of conversations had with these half-human half-fish creatures.

Such stories of mermaids have existed for thousands of years and from around the world, with one of the earliest mermaid legends appearing in the Middle East around 1000 BC. In Africa, for example, tales exist of mythical water spirits called "Mother of the Waters" and in Irish mythology mermaids are described as "maighdean mhara" meaning the "maiden of the sea".¹

Source: What is a Mermaid? <https://www.rmg.co.uk/discover/explore/what-mermaid>



An Mhaighdean
Mhara Fhainait

Great Famine Emigrant Ship

The Jeanie Johnston (a three-masted barque) was owned by John Donovan & Sons of Tralee. It was a famine time emigrant ship that sailed from Tralee to North America.¹

Between 1848 and 1855, it made 16 transatlantic journeys, each taking approximately 50 days. In total 2,500 Irish emigrants crossed the Atlantic in the Jeanie Johnston.²

While emigrant ships were often known as coffin ships, the Jeannie Johnston never lost a crew member or passenger. This is credited to the ship not being overloaded, having adequate supplies, and having a humanitarian doctor on board, one of whom was Richard Blennerhassett of the Blennerville Windmill family.²

A replica of the Jeanie Johnston was built and officially named by President Mary McAleese in Fenit, Co. Kerry, on 7 May 2000. The ship set sail from Fenit to North America to commemorate the 150th anniversary of famine time emigration.³

Data Sources:

¹ <https://focuskerry.com/jeanie/departure.html>

² Murphy, Brendan John. 'County Kerry 101 Interesting Facts'. Bloomhill Publishers, 2015.

³ <https://www.rte.ie/archives/2015/0507/699311-naming-of-the-jeanie-johnston>



Credit: Jeanie Johnston with kind permission of local artist Donal Stack

Oileán Eamon

The Old Village in the Fenit Tawlaght Area

Oileán Eamon was the old village and also the site of an ancient settlement.

Oileán Eamon stretched from the western end of Fenit to West Tawlaght with 15-20 houses on the western side. It is also the likely location of the Tawlaght plague burial site at the west end of Oileán Eamon, West Tawlaght. Further north east leading to Fenit sound are remnants of a small cluster of homes were also part of the old village.¹ Before the famine it was estimated three hundred people lived in area of the old village. Basic livelihoods were made fishing and working small plots of land.²

This area also has remnants of a former ancient settlement or village. At the west end of Oileán Eamon underground passages covered by stone mounds were evident until recently. These early homesteads with underground passages (souterrains) date back to the Early Christian period.¹

¹O'Connor, Mary. "When Battle's Done – Barrow, Spa, Fenit, and Hinterlands. The Kerryman Ltd, Tralee, 1996.

² Tawlaght Village. Account by J. Lynch, Fenit. From transcript of Bridie Bassil, local Folklorist.

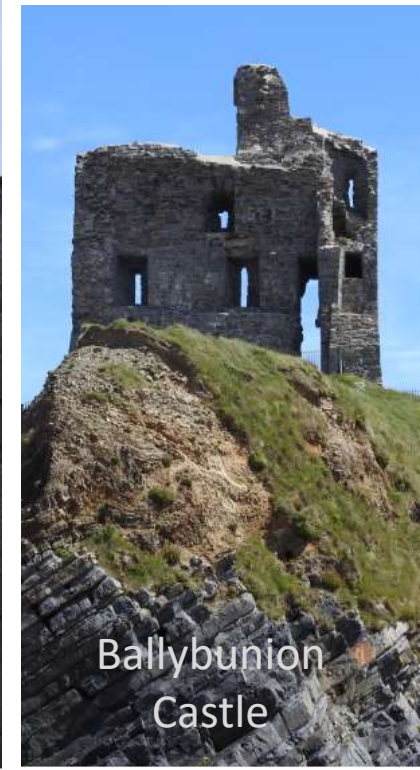


Overlooking Fenit Island

Tawlaght, Churchill & Barrow



Afternoon Heritage Drive from Fenit



Fenit Area Historical Landmarks

Fenit, Tawlaght and adjacent townlands are rich in historical landmarks including numerous medieval ringforts some with underground passages still intact.

Fenit Within: Castle, Church, Chapel and 3 Possible Stone Enclosures

Fenit Without: 2 Stone Enclosures

Tawlaght: 2 Ringforts, Souterrain, 4 Stone Enclosure, 2 Further Possible Enclosures

Kilfinora: Church & Graveyard

Ballyea: Stone Enclosure

Knocknarnet: Stone Enclosure, and 1 Further Possible Enclosure

Lissodeige: 5 Ringforts, 1 Enclosure, 3 Possible Souterrains, 1 Midden

Barrow: Castle, Promontory Fort, Church, Ringfort, Ecclesiastical Remains, 5 Stone Enclosures, Cashel Site, 2 Souterrain, Burial Grounds, 1 Additional Possible Enclosure

The above listing is abstracted from the 'Record of Monuments and Places, - County Kerry' National Monuments and Historic Properties Service, 1997.

Note: *Respect private lands when exploring.*



Ná Fág Ach Lorg Coise

Leave Only Your Footprints

An Extract from:
Fenit – A Walk in the Wild Place

Author Trisha O'Halloran, Fenit, 2020

Photos and art by Trisha unless otherwise cited

