



Hook Lighthouse

One of the oldest operational Lighthouses In the world

Purpose built as a Lighthouse 800 years ago, and still fully operational, Hook Lighthouse truly is one of a kind!

Your Tour Guide will take you through the Lighthouse culminating with the spectacular view from the balcony.

The visitor centre is located in the former keepers houses where there is a first class gift shop and café, our friendly staff are happy to help with any tourist information you require.

www.hookheritage.ie

Safety Precautions

Hook Lighthouse is a 13th Century building, care is necessary when inside the tower. Please hold the handrail on ascent and descent. Walk with care as the building is subject to condensation which renders the steps slippery. The doorways and parts of the stairway are at a low level, please mind your head. Guardians of children should be mindful of their safety and ensure they observe all the safety instructions of the tower. Please refrain from eating, drinking and smoking in the tower.

The Hook, Co. Wexford.

The tapering headland of Hook Head, located in the south-western corner of county Wexford, forms the eastern boundary of the great estuary known as Waterford Harbour. The headland is sometimes called a peninsula which means “almost an island”. The bedrock consists of two types of sedimentary rock: old red sandstone and limestone. A band of old red sandstone runs across the peninsula from Broomhill to Carnivan. For centuries this was quarried at Herrylock to make millstones, water troughs and other objects. The point of Hook itself consists of fossil-bearing carboniferous limestone. The limestone rock was burned in the many limekilns which can still be seen on the peninsula. The limestone powder which this produced was used to improve the quality of the soil. It was also mixed with sand to make lime mortar for building stone walls and houses.

Because of the rivers Barrow, Nore and Suir which flow into the estuary it was known in Irish as Comar na dtrí nUisce (the confluence of three waters). The Vikings called it Vandra Fiord (the weather estuary) which was the origin of the name Waterford. In the fifth century a monk named Dubhán established a monastery on the peninsula. The medieval church at Churchtown, built on the site of Dubhán’s monastery, incorporated part of an early Christian monastery. The headland became known as Rinn Dubháin (Dubhán’s headland). Although Dubhán is also the Irish word for fishing hook, it is likely that the headland got its present name from the old English word Hook, meaning a projecting piece of land. According to tradition, the monks from Dubhán’s monastery erected the first fire beacon to warn seafarers to keep away from the dangerous rocks.

Who built the Tower of Hook?

The Anglo-Normans landed in Ireland in 1169 as mercenaries in the service of Dermot MacMurrough, deposed King of Leinster. Their landing places, at Bannow, Baginbun and Passage can all be seen from the Tower of Hook. The Norman leader, Richard de Clare, known as Strongbow, was given Dermot's daughter, Aoife, in marriage. After Dermot's death, Strongbow became Lord of Leinster. Strongbow was succeeded by his son-in-law, William Marshal, who came to Ireland in the early thirteenth century. Realising the importance of Waterford Harbour and its river system for trade and shipping, Marshal established the port of New Ross on the River Barrow, about 30 km from the open sea.

Marshal knew that, if his port of Ross was to be successful, shipping would need to be guided safely into Waterford Harbour through the dangerous waters off the point of Hook. As a navigation aid, he had a 30m high circular tower constructed at the tip of the peninsula to act as a landmark by day and a fire-tower at night. Marshal granted the monks from the nearby monastery of Rinn Dubhán an annual allowance to act as custodians of the light, a task which they had performed for several centuries. The monks lived in the tower which served as a monastery as well as a lighthouse. Traces of their chapel which projected to the east of the building still survive. Marshal's idea for a light-tower may have been inspired by Mediterranean examples, such as the lighthouse of Pharos in Alexandria, which he may have seen when he was on crusade to the Holy Land. The design of the tower was based on the cylindrical castles which were popular in France where Marshal spent many years.

As well as the Tower of Hook, Marshal was responsible for building a number of other important buildings in Ireland. These included Tintern Abbey, Ferns Castle, Carlow Castle, Kilkenny Castle and St. Mary's Church in New Ross. Most of these castles built by Marshal in Ireland also had circular towers.

The construction of Hook Lighthouse.

The Hook Lighthouse is a unique example of an almost intact medieval lighthouse. Built in the early thirteenth century it continues to serve its original function. It is believed to be one of the oldest operational lighthouses in the world.

Hook Lighthouse is one of the most fascinating examples of medieval architecture in Ireland. The tower stands four storeys high with walls up to 4 metres thick. The tower was constructed of local limestone and the original building survives almost intact. Standing 36 metres high, the tower consists of two tiers linked by a mural (within the wall) stairway of 115 steps. The first tier is 13m in diameter at the base and has three storeys, each consisting of a rib-vaulted chamber with original thirteenth century fireplace. In the thickness of the wall there are a number of small mural chambers, including two garderobes (toilets). The upper tier is 6m in diameter: originally it supported the fire beacon, which in later times was replaced by a lantern.

The Tower Through The Ages.

For several centuries after its construction, the Tower of Hook remained under the control of the town of New Ross. The mayor and corporation of New Ross demonstrated their authority by travelling to the point of Hook where they would shoot an arrow into the sea and climbed the tower. It is not known how long the monks continued to act as custodians: it is possible that the work may have been taken over by lay people.

In 1671, a new, but still coal burning lantern was installed on top of the tower to replace the old beacon light. Further improvements were carried out in 1704. In the late seventeenth century the ownership of the tower passed to Henry Loftus who had acquired the lands of the Hook after Cromwell's campaign in Ireland. In 1728, Nicholas Loftus, known as "the extinguisher", threatened to close the lighthouse unless he was given an increase of rent by the authorities.

The coal fire was finally abandoned in 1791 when a whale oil lantern 12ft. in diameter with 12 lamps was installed. Further improvements followed when the tower was handed over to The Corporation for Preserving and Improving the Port of Dublin (Ballast Office) in 1810 with the expenditure of £4,280 on new apparatus. Further improvements were carried out in 1863 during which the lighthouse assumed its present shape. New gas lights were installed in 1871, lit by gas manufactured in the enclosure still known as the gas-yard. During the 1800's, three dwellings were built for light-keepers and their families. Paraffin oil became the source of power in 1911 and a clockwork mechanism was installed to change the beacon from a fixed to a flashing light. The mechanism, which had to be wound up every 25 minutes, turned on a platform on which three huge lenses were mounted. Finally, in 1972, electricity became the power source and light sensitive switches were installed to control the lantern. In March 1996, the Hook Lighthouse was converted to automatic operation and the last of the light-keepers who had climbed the stairs and tended the light for almost eight hundred years were permanently withdrawn from the station. The lighthouse is now remotely controlled and monitored at the Lighthouse Depot in Dun Laoghaire.

Fog signals are operated from the lighthouse as a warning to sea-farers during dense fog which can suddenly descend on the peninsula. The signal was essential in the days before radar and radio. Fog guns which

stood on the edge of the cliff, and fired every 10 minutes during fog, were later replaced by a hooter. This in turn was replaced by detonators or rockets which were exploded on metal arms extending from the top of the lighthouse. In 1972 a fog-horn worked by compressed air was installed and during foggy weather its melancholy sound reverberates over land and sea.

In 1867 the body in charge of lighthouse services became known as the Commissioners of Irish Lights. The Commissioners are responsible for the provision and maintenance of lighthouses and other aids to navigation for the island of Ireland. They are funded from light dues charged on commercial shipping in Irish and British ports, supplemented by an annual contribution from the Irish government. Around the coast of Ireland the principal services provided by the Commissioners include over 80 lighthouses, automatic lightfloats, large automatic navigational buoys (LANBY's), differential GPS stations, and buoys. Offshore lighthouses are serviced by helicopter shore bases, some of which are also used for search and rescue activities. CIL's Vision Statement is to deliver reliable, efficient and cost effective Aids to Navigation Service for the benefit and safety of all Mariners.