



Brief History of Elizabeth Fort

Elizabeth Fort is a 17th century star shaped fort off Barrack Street in Cork city, Ireland. Originally built as a defensive fortification outside the city walls, the city eventually grew around the fort, and it took on various other roles – including use as a military barracks, prison, and Garda station.

The fort was built after the Battle of Kinsale, in 1601, by Sir George Carew, the then President of Munster. Named for Queen Elizabeth I, it served as both a defensive structure and a symbol of English authority in Cork. Similar forts were also built at this time on Haulbowline Island in Cork harbour and James Fort in Kinsale. The original fort was built of timber and earth, as can still be seen in James Fort today.

The first structure did not last long. After the death of Elizabeth I in 1603, the people of Cork refused to acknowledge the crowning of James I. The citizens, fearing the fort being used against them, demolished it and removed the guns into the city. It was not long however before Lord Mountjoy and his forces seized the city and forced the citizens to rebuild the fort at their own expense.

The fort was rebuilt in stone in 1624-26. It was at this time that the fort became star-shaped and is largely the same layout today.

Elizabeth Fort has played a role in many of the events affecting the city of Cork throughout its history. Following on from the Cromwellian conquest in the mid-seventeenth century, Cromwell is reputed to have made a number of defensive alterations to the fort, primarily making the ramparts higher.

During the Williamite War in Ireland, Cork became a Jacobite stronghold after the Battle of the Boyne. The city and Elizabeth Fort were besieged for a number of days. The city walls were breached and both the city and fort were surrendered. The siege effectively saw the end of Elizabeth Fort as a defensive fortification.

In 1719 a military barracks was built within the fort. At this time the ramparts were thinned to provide the extra space required to accommodate the soldiers.

In 1806 a new barracks was built on the north side of the city leading to the closure of the barracks at Elizabeth Fort. In the following years Elizabeth Fort was put to use as a convict depot for prisoners awaiting transportation and later, as a food depot during the Great Famine.

Later the fort again reverted to military use becoming a station of the Cork City Artillery Militia and during the Irish War of Independence was used as a base by the “Black and Tans”. In the succeeding Irish Civil War, the buildings within the fort were burned by anti-treaty forces. Although the walls of the fort survived, the current interior buildings date from a rebuild following this fire. Until recently, these buildings were in use as a Garda station.

Cork City Council has now taken possession of Elizabeth Fort and plan to develop this valuable asset as a tourist attraction within the city. The fort’s location and vantage point over the city make it ideal to serve as a hub from which visitors can be directed around the city, county and country.

