

Martello Tower

Ardagh Hill

Beara-Breifne Way
Slí Bhéara-Breifne



The Martello Tower, here, on Ardagh Hill was restored in recent years and is well worth a visit. A climb to the top of the tower rewards the visitor with an astounding view of the Bay in all directions from Sheeps Head to Bantry and Berehaven Harbour. Aerial photographs clearly reveal a circular fortification around the tower at a distance of about one hundred metres from it.

The tower was one of a series constructed by the British in a rush to defend Bantry Bay following the attempted French invasion of 1796. Ironically, the construction is based on a French design encountered by the British just a few years earlier in Corsica at Cape Mortella. The Corsican tower, armed with just three artillery pieces and a tiny garrison, had enabled the French to ward off a British naval attack of 106 artillery pieces for a protracted period of time and to inflict heavy losses on the British. Learning from their misfortune in Corsica, the British quickly copied this design.

Local accounts suggest that work on the island's Martello Towers began in 1798. Most of the stone for Ardagh tower was quarried on the south side of Ardagh Hill, while the limestone blocks are believed to have been brought from Ballintemple in Cork City.

The remains of an associated gun battery are to be seen about two hundred metres east of the tower. The Martello tower and gun battery were garrisoned until after the Battle of Waterloo, 1815, when the threat from Napoleon no longer existed.



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