

“That Cork County Council would, in joint co-operation with Cork City Council, prepare a submission for the following collection of related sites and fortifications to be considered for inclusion on the World Heritage List:

Spike Island (Fort Westmoreland/Mitchell) – Fort Camden/Meagher – Fort Carlisle/Davis – Ringaskiddy Martello Tower – Haulbowline Island Martello Tower – Haulbowline Island naval buildings – the Belvelly, Rossleague and Monning Martello Towers – Collins Barracks – Ballincollig Royal Gunpowder Mills.”

You will appreciate that it is difficult to give adequate credit to the combined 4,000 years of history of these 11 sites in 3 minutes.

Each is listed on the Record of Protected Structures because of its inherent heritage value. But what is not protected is that which makes them unique and of what I believe is undoubtedly World Heritage status. It is that which I am going to use my 3 minutes to attempt to illustrate.

During the 1700s, Cork City flourished. Its economic fortunes were intrinsically linked to Cork Harbour and the export of provisions, largely to the British navy.

When France’s military star, Napoleon Bonaparte, became emperor in 1802, he amassed a huge army and 2,000 ships. He planned to invade Britain. As all food from Ireland to British troops left through Cork, Cork and its huge harbour were particularly vulnerable. This is when the incredible network of fortifications from the mouth of Cork Harbour right up through the River Lee to Ballincollig was developed and constructed.

The five military installations in Lower Cork Harbour were all designed with overlapping fields of fire to work together in protecting the harbour mouth and the naval base on Haulbowline Island. Those 5 are ...

- Fort Camden: The 45 acre Fort Camden is internationally recognised as one of the best remaining examples of a classical coastal artillery fort in the world. It houses the Brennan Torpedo, of which there are only 8 in the world.
- Fort Carlisle has been occupied by military forces for its entire 400 years. It has 4 batteries and over 20 guns, one of which was used in only three other coastal defence locations in the world.
- Fort Westmoreland is on Spike Island. Spike Island is, of course, so much more but the 24 acre star-shaped fortress, in which the British army was based from 1806, became the largest prison in the world from which thousands of Irish prisoners were exported to Australia.
- Two Martello Towers at Ringaskiddy and Haulbowline - these were built to engage ships that succeeded in getting past Forts Camden and Carlisle. Three more were built on the northern shores of Great Island to protect against an invasion by land. The British military regarded the Martello Towers of Cork Harbour as being the epitome of Martello Tower design and construction. The tower at Ringaskiddy is particularly fine and is today the largest Martello Tower of any reasonable condition standing in an original moat in the world.
- The naval base itself was on Haulbowline Island. The site of the world’s first yacht club in 1720, Haulbowline had fortifications dating back 200 years before the British navy and Board of Ordnance established a base there. Magazines, storehouses, yards and much more were

developed to serve the Navy and then in the 1860s, the island was enlarged to accommodate the development of a Naval Dockyard for warship repair and construction.

- Built in 1806, Collins Barracks included a military detention barracks. After the barracks was handed over to the Department of Justice, this was used as a civilian prison from 1972 until 2016.
- The Gunpowder Mills were taken over and expanded by the British Board of Ordnance at the onset of the Napoleonic Wars. The provision of housing for the mills' hundreds of workers created the basis for a village at Ballincollig. The networks of sluices and canals used in the manufacturing process and over 50 of the mill structures still survive on the site of what is now the Ballincollig Regional Park.

~~Ironically, although Cork was so well protected by this network of military installations, Napoleon never invaded. The damage actually came later when the British economy, struggling in the aftermath of the war, reduced its imports of merchant goods and decimated Cork trade.~~

These 11 military installations forming a Napoleonic landscape that stretches from the Cork Harbour mouth all the way to Ballincollig are indivisible parts of a whole. The architectural value of this network, its construction (much of which was by prison labour), its function within the wider Cork landscape and its intimate relationship to a period of social history now gone would, in their own right, qualify for consideration for the World Heritage List. But to put forward this military landscape with the massive 1300 year old heritage of Spike Island would surely clinch it. When Spike Island won second place in the World Travel Awards last year, it was competing with such sites as the Great Wall of China (a World Heritage Site since 1987), Kilimanjaro (the Kilimanjaro National Park is a World Heritage Site since 1987) and Machu Picchu, the Peruvian Inca citadel inscribed as a World Heritage Site in 1983. Robben Island, the island prison outside Cape Town has, without the support of an associated group of structures, been a World Heritage Site since 1999. Of particular relevance to Cork is Kingston, Ontario, where the collective of five British-built military coastal defence fortifications and the upstream Rideau Canal were entered on the World Heritage List in 2007. The parallels are myriad. The quality of what we have to offer is undoubtedly of World Heritage status.

Members, I ask for your support in recommending this world-class aspect of Cork's heritage to the executive of Cork City and County Councils for promotion to the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and the OPW as worthy of inclusion on Ireland's tentative list so that it can be nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List.

Note: The Port of Cork buildings were constructed during the Napoleonic Wars by the prisoners of Spike Island. The bonded warehouses are one of two such remaining in the world. I did not include these in the proposed list of structures because their purpose was merchant rather than military. But they too are intrinsically linked to the military network and their inclusion may enhance the social history element of the proposal.