



Waterford Castle

The historic past of a castle on a private island



ABOVE: Built entirely out of stone, the east and west wings were added during the nineteenth century



The castle is located on a private island in the River Suir, just downstream from Waterford, the oldest city in Ireland. The 310-acre island, only a two-minute ferry ride from the mainland, has seen more than its fair share of inhabitants over the centuries.

Monks are believed to have been the first to inhabit The Island (6th–8th century). They were attracted by the site's seclusion,

but they came under frequent attack from others more interested in its strategic importance, and eventually the monks had to move to a safer haven. Two archaeological finds dating from this period, a crude carving of a monk's head and a winged angel, are now prominently displayed over the main entrance to the castle.

From the ninth to the eleventh centuries, the Vikings stamped their mark on the The Island, building two fortifications to guard the river to the north and the south. Records show that during this time The Island was referred to as Dane's Island or Island Vryk.

Fitzgerald family

The first family to live on The Island were the Fitzgeralds. Maurice Fitzgerald, Earl of Pembroke and a cousin of Richard 'Strongbow' de Clare, was rewarded for his part in the Norman invasion of 1170

with large tracts of land, including The Island where he decided to make his home. This sealed the fate of The Island for eight centuries in one of the longest unbroken stewardships on record in Ireland.

The first structure built by the Fitzgeralds was a Norman keep, a tower-like stone building with thick walls that also acted as a fortified post during battle. By the fifteenth century, the keep was no longer habitable and a tower was built in its place (it forms the centre part of the present castle). Initially the tower was relatively small, but it gradually expanded during the nineteenth century when the east and west wings were added. Built entirely out of stone, these additions are now almost indistinguishable from the older structure.

Over the centuries, the Fitzgeralds became Kings of Ireland in all but name, and hosted many feasts and banquets on The Island. Some of its more prominent members included:

Mary Frances Fitzgerald (c.1775–1855)

A formidable lady who dominated the social scene of the time. She was engaged to the Duke of Wellington, 'The Iron Duke', who defeated Napoleon at Waterloo and later became the British Prime Minister. She broke off the engagement to marry her first cousin, John Purcell, who took the name Fitzgerald when Mary inherited her father's estate.

Edward Fitzgerald (1809–1883)

Son of Mary Fitzgerald, Edward was a poet and writer. He is best known as the translator of *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, a collection of poems originally written in Farsi by the Persian mathematician, astronomer and poet Omar Khayyám. Some critics maintain that the quality of Fitzgerald's translation exceeds that of Khayyám's original verse.

Mary Augusta de Lisle Purcell Fitzgerald (1908–1968)

Mary Augusta the last of the Fitzgeralds to own the castle, ending the family's eight hundred-year legacy. She married an Italian prince, Prince Caracciolo, whom she met while studying in Italy. On their return to Ireland, they made their home in Dublin, where she was a prominent patron of the arts.



ABOVE: The Great Hall is decorated with Elizabethan oak panelling. RIGHT: (above) Beautiful antique furniture adorns every room; (below) A carved stone feature



A new era

In 1958 Princess Caracciolo sold the property, and it changed hands a number of times until 1987 when it was developed into a luxurious hotel and country club.

The current owner, Seamus Walsh, a local man from Mullinavat, Co. Kilkenny, purchased The Island in 2015 and, along with his family, has embraced the heritage of this historic island and beautiful castle. **A**



ABOVE: A Victorian Rococo gilt carved wood mirror hangs above the fireplace in the Fitzgerald Room. LEFT: Reminders of The Island's elegant past can be seen throughout the castle