

Tintern Abbey Wexford

Situated on the west shore of Bannow Bay in Co. Wexford, Tintern Abbey was one of the most powerful Cistercian foundations in the South East until the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1536.

The first Cistercian foundation in Ireland, at Mellifont, Co. Louth in 1142 was part of sweeping reforms which took place in the Irish Church in the 12th century.

The early Cistercians, who had their origins in the monastery of Citeaux in France, were dedicated to a simple life of prayer and manual labour.

By 1169, when the Anglo-Normans arrived in Ireland, there were already 15 Cistercian houses in Ireland.

In 1200, William Marshal, Earl of Pembroke, set sail for Ireland on his first visit as Lord of Leinster. Threatened with shipwreck, he vowed to found an abbey wherever he could safely land.

On reaching safety in Bannow Bay, he redeemed his vow bequeathing about 9000 acres of land for a Cistercian abbey. Consequently, Tintern Abbey, sited on a gentle south-facing slope overlooking Tintern stream, is sometimes called Tintern de Voto 'Tintern of the vow.' Once established, the abbey was colonised by monks from the Cistercian abbey at Tintern in Monmouthshire, Wales, of which Marshal was also patron.

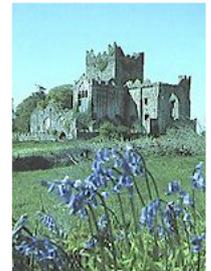
Following its foundation, Tintern acquired large tracts of land in Co. Wexford and at the Dissolution of the Monasteries, appears to have been the third richest Cistercian abbey in Ireland (after St. Mary's in Dublin and Mellifont).

Shortly after, Tintern Abbey and its lands were granted to Anthony Colclough from Staffordshire, an officer in Henry VIII's army.

The Colclough family extensively modified the abbey church, converting the crossing tower and later, the nave, chancel and Lady Chapel to domestic quarters. In the 18th century Sir Vesey Colclough built many of the fine battlemented walls seen around the abbey today.

In the 1790s, John Colclough converted the nave into a residence of neo-Gothic style. He also established a flour mill, the ruins of which stand on the south bank of the stream close to the upper bridge.

At this period also, a thriving weaving industry had developed in Tintern village, located across the stream south-west of the abbey.



Following John's death, his brother Caesar inherited the estate and shortly after 1814 built the village of Saltmills to replace the old village of Tintern which was then demolished.

The final member of the Colclough family to reside at Tintern was Lucey Marie Biddulph Colclough who left in 1959, a few years before the abbey was taken into Government care.

Conservation and consolidation works started at Tintern in the early 1980s and archeological excavations between 1982 and 1994 exposed many of the features of the original Cistercian abbey.

Constructed to the standard Cistercian plan, the abbey church was located to the north of an enclosed cloister garth which was surrounded on all sides by covered walks and a sequence of domestic buildings.