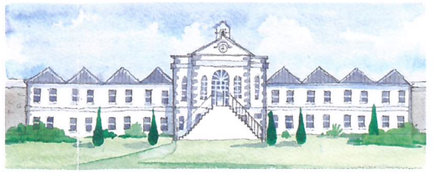
COBH Historic port town

2. Cobh Railway Station

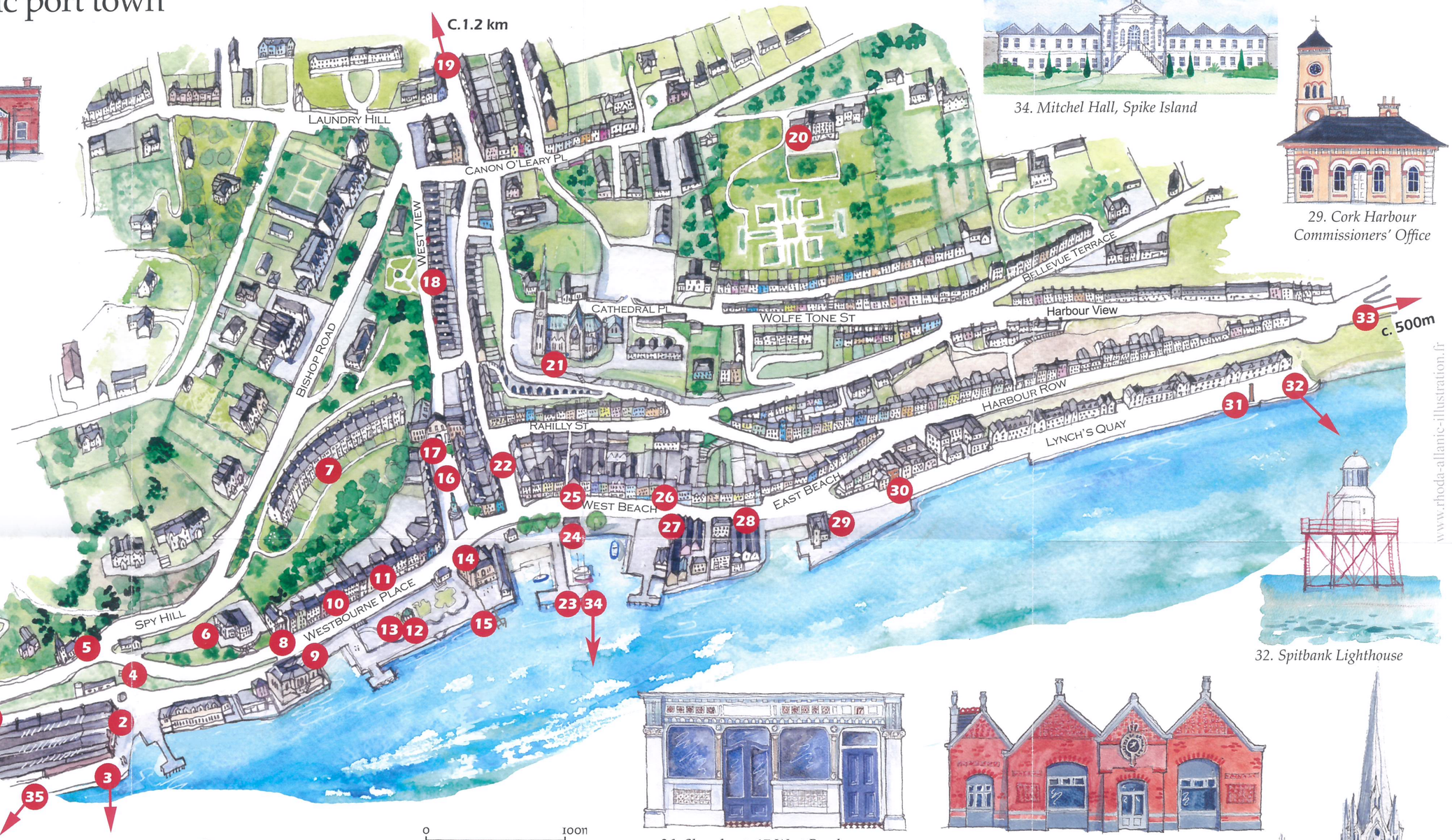
5. Scots Presbyterian Church

6. Carrig House



34. Mitchel Hall, Spike Island

29. Cork Harbour Commissioners' Office

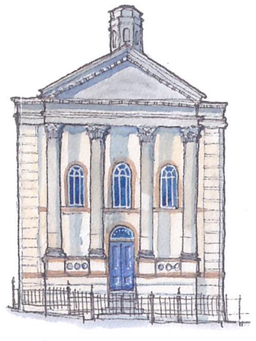


26. Shop front, 17 West Beach

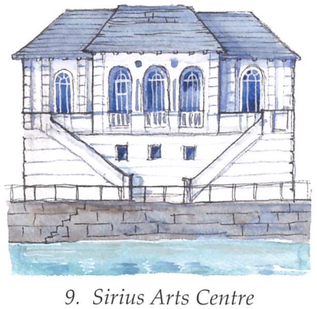
27. Cunard Line Office

32. Spitbank Lighthouse

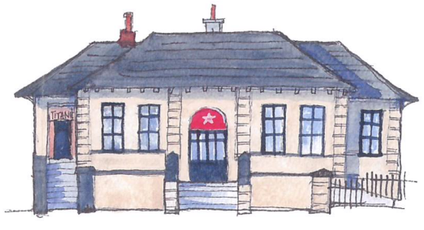
7. The Crescent



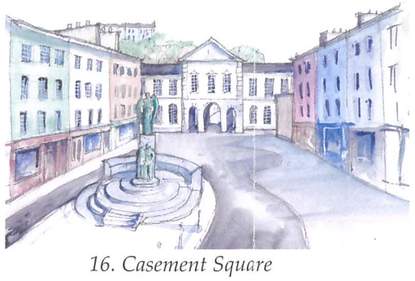
8. Methodist Church



9. Sirius Arts Centre



14. White Star Line Office



16. Casement Square

21. St Colman's Cathedral

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COBH

The attractive port town of Cobh, with colourful buildings lining its steep hillside streets, is a dominant feature of Cork Harbour. In the late 1700s *The Cove* was little more than a cluster of fishermen's cottages, but the 1800s saw the settlement expand, and by 1837 nearly 7,000 inhabitants lived in what was described as a large and handsome town. In 1849 the town, last port of call for many Irish emigrants during that time, was given a new name, Queenstown, to commemorate a visit by Queen Victoria. It was renamed Cobh in 1920.

Cobh became a busy port in the 19th century with a booming transatlantic maritime trade. Cork Harbour was also an important base for the British Navy. Its strategic significance was recognised with the construction of several fortifications, especially during the Napoleonic Wars, including forts Camden *(Fort Meagher)*, Carlisle *(Fort Davis)*, and Westmoreland *(Fort Mitchel)*, as well as the depot on Haulbowline island nearby. The massive Catholic Cathedral, which today dominates the skyline, marks the growing importance of the town in the late 19th century, when it also became an important tourist destination. The town's busy commercial life is reflected by the survival of many traditional shopfronts. Cobh today is one of the country's best examples of a Victorian and Edwardian town and remains a thriving vibrant maritime and tourist town.

Sites to see (sites marked with an asterisk * are outside the scope of the map)

1. **RAILWAY WORKERS HOUSE:** Built in 1880-1890 and known locally as the Station Master's House. This is one of several workers' houses constructed in Cobh between c.1880 and 1950.
2. **COBH RAILWAY STATION:** Now Cobh Heritage Centre *'The Queenstown Story'* which depicts the story of the Irish Emigration. Built for the Great Southern and Western Railway in 1888-90. The station, a terminus on the Cork-Queenstown line, was instrumental in the expansion of the town. It retains some wonderful Victorian detailing, particularly the stepped red-brick façade.
3. **HAULBOWLINE ISLAND***: The closest island to the town, directly to its south. Haulbowline was a major naval base in the 19th century. The six naval stores, built in the early 1820s, with their distinctive neo-classical proportions, are an important part of Cobh's heritage. The island also has a Martello Tower, which was part of Cork Harbour's Napoleonic War defences. Haulbowline's seal colony can often be seen from ferries heading to Spike Island.
4. **RAILWAY STEPS:** This flight of 85 steps is one of several built in the 18th and 19th centuries to access the steep slopes so synonymous with Cobh.
5. **SCOTS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH:** Built in 1854 in the neo-gothic style. The tall entrance tower with its pointed windows and fine stone detailing is eye-catching. Now Cobh Museum.
6. **CARRIG HOUSE:** Built in 1860, a fine classically styled house with notable entrance portico, lodge and gates. It reflects the growth of middle-class housing here in the 19th century. Currently used as Cork County Council offices.
7. **THE CRESCENT:** This beautiful curved terrace of houses in Italianate-style with classical proportions was built c.1860. It has some wonderful original details including window and door fittings and decorative embellishments.
8. **METHODIST CHURCH:** Built in 1873 with an imposing temple front featuring fine stonework and triangular pediment with a cupola overhead. This highlights the importance of the neo-classical style for public buildings at this period.
9. **SIRIUS ARTS CENTRE:** Designed by Anthony Salvin in 1854 for the Sailing Club which was established in 1720 and later became the Royal Cork Yacht Club.
10. **WESTBOURNE PLACE:** This terrace of four-storey houses was built by the Scott family, important shipping agents, in 1854-1855. The houses share a beautiful cast iron balcony
11. **COMMODORE HOTEL:** This four-storey hotel, with its wide façade dominating the waterfront, was built in 1854-5 by William Joyce. It was frequented by the well-off before they departed on transatlantic liners that docked in the Harbour.
12. **BANDSTAND:** The bandstand was first erected c.1900 and was restored in 2001. The iron detailing by McFarlance & Co. Glasgow forms a centrepiece to the promenade which was created on the site of Columbine Quay.
13. **PAIR OF CANNON:** Dated 1794 and bearing the GR insignia (George Rex- King George), these guns evoke the military and naval heritage of the town.
14. **WHITE STAR LINE OFFICE:** Built in 1870 for one of the largest and most successful shipping lines operating in the 19th century. The White Star Shipping Line is famous for the construction of the Titanic. Now a bar and visitor attraction.
15. **TITANIC PIER:** This small jetty was the last point of contact with land for the 123 people who boarded the small tender boats that carried them out to the ill-fated Titanic in 1912.
16. **CASEMENT SQUARE:** Known originally as Scott's Square or New Square, it was laid out c. 1850. It features a memorial by Jerome Connor to the victims of the Lusitania, which was sunk by a German U boat off the Cork coast in 1915. Many of the 1193 victims and 761 survivors were brought ashore in Cobh.
17. **TOWN HALL AND MARKET HOUSE:** Built in 1851-2, this fine building is characterised by a strong sense of symmetry. The neo-classical features include the triangular and rounded pediments over the windows and the beautifully curved brackets and moulded eaves. The building commands Casement Square and creates a focal point in the heart of the town. It was designed by Cork architect Alexander Deane. Now housing the library and tourist information office.

18. **WEST VIEW TERRACE:** This terrace of brightly colored gable-fronted houses, stepped down along the steeply sloped street is one of the iconic images of Cobh. Knows as The Deck of Cards, it was built in the 1850s and reflects the flamboyance of the town's Victorian architecture.
19. **CLONMEL CHURCH AND GRAVEYARD*:** Locally known as Old Church. Built in the 1690s on the site of the medieval parish church of Clonmel. It was in use until 1805 when the parish place of worship moved into Cobh town. The graveyard contains many interesting graves including some of the victims of the sinking of the Lusitania.
20. **ADMIRALTY HOUSE:** Built in 1886 and rebuilt in 1928-9 following a fire. The Admiral of the British Naval fleet in Cork Harbour was based in this building which evokes the prestige of this position. The fine veranda overlooks the Harbour. Now a Benedictine Convent.
21. **ST. COLMAN'S CATHEDRAL:** Dominating the town's skyline, this ornate limestone cathedral was commenced in 1868 and was consecrated in 1915. The neo gothic building, designed by E.W. Pugin and G.C. Ashlin, displays fine artistry and superb detail. The spire of the cathedral was one of the last sights seen by Irish emigrants as they left for America.
22. **PEARSE SQUARE:** Laid out in 1804-10 as part of a civic development of the town, this square, originally known as King's Square, retains some lovely and eclectic range of 19th century buildings.
23. **KENNEDY PIER:** The T-plan pier is one of the main focal points of the town. Built with limestone battered wall with cast-iorn railings. It was a feat of engineering when built in 1853. Today it is the departure point for ferries to Spike Island [34].

Terracotta flower panels on the Cunard Line Office [27]

24. **WEST BEACH KIOSK:** Known as the coffee stall, this rare survival of a small Victorian kiosk was built in 1883 to provide refreshments for the passer by. It was mounted on wheels, still visible cemented into the footpath, to avoid having to pay rates as a permanent structure.
25. **SOLDIERS' HOME:** Charlotte Grace O'Brien opened a charitable Emigrants Home here in April of 1882. The building burned down towards the end of the 1800s and was rebuilt to include a Soldiers' Home in 1900. The beautiful stone façade was designed by William Crawford Ryder.
26. **WEST BEACH SHOPS:** Terrace of shops with fine timber shopfronts. Number 17 has some wonderful render and tile detailing with slim columns dividing the display windows. The painted glass of number 18's shopfront portrays more of an early 20th century fashion, with the bay window over adding lovely textural contrast. Number 19 has some finely carved timber and render detailing.
27. **CUNARD LINE OFFICES:** Built in 1890. The Cunard Steamship Company was one of the largest shipping lines operating between Europe and America in the 19th century. Look out for the wonderful painted plaster crest and terracotta flower panels. The pier behind was once a busy embarkation point.
28. **YOUNG MEN'S SOCIETY HALL:** Built in 1904. The hall had a reading room and library. It was built as a social outlet for young men in the town and as part of the temperance movement. While displaying the rounded window openings seen elsewhere in the town, this building also employs render detailing and exposed timber framing in the neo-tudor style. It is now a shop.
29. **CORK HARBOUR COMMISSIONERS OFFICE:** Built in 1874 in the Italianate style characterised by overhanging eaves, brackets, and arcades of windows. The distinctive lighthouse-like tower is appropriate here on the waterfront.
30. **CUSTOMS HOUSE:** Built c.1900 with some striking monochrome red brick and terracotta detailing. The terracotta raised lettering is noteworthy.
31. **BRICK CHIMNEY:** Built in 1907, this chimney served the coal burner powerhouse which provided electricity to the town. The tower was adjacent to the site of the public baths, built in 1896 by the Queenstown Sea Baths and Recreation Company under the guidance of architect Dominick J. Coakley. The baths represent the many leisure services developed in Cobh in the 1800s.
32. **SPITBANK LIGHTHOUSE*:** Freestanding cast-iron lighthouse, built in 1853 by Alexander Mitchell. The structure was screw piled into a sand spit and marks a dangerous shallow in the Harbour's shipping lanes
33. **COVE BATTERY*:** Built in 1743-9, to replace a series of coastal fortifications which were created to the east of Cobh in the 1600s. By 1811 this battery housed twenty 24-pounder guns. Following the construction of a series of Martello Towers, the Naval Base at Haulbowline, and Forts Westmoreland, Camden and Carlisle, the Battery became the Queenstown Military Hospital, and remained in operation until after World War I. The beach, accessed to the west of the fort, affords some good views of the stone bastion walls. Now a Titanic Memorial Garden and Port of Cork Harbour Operation Station.
34. **SPIKE ISLAND *(INIS PIC)*:** The island has in turn hosted a monastery, a fortress and a prison within its 104 acres. Today, it is dominated by Fort Westmorland, a 19th century bastion fort (and associated buildings) built as part of the harbour defences. The fort was later used as a prison, and many a famous Irish rebel was imprisoned here in advance of deportation including the Irish Nationalist John Mitchel. The fort was renamed Fort Mitchel in his honour in 1951. In 2010 it was taken over by Cork County Council who developed into one of the county's major tourist attractions.
35. **AMERICAN PIER:** Constructed by the US Navy to facilitate the transfer of patients from ships to the Field Hospital at Whitepoint House when the United States entered World War 1 on April 6th 1917.

Map for information purposes only - Does not provide access Printed June 2023

A Victorian Port Town

Viewed from the harbour, the architectural complexity of the town is clear. Formally designed around several squares, it embodies a neo-classical character synonymous with 19th century Cork. Much of the design was by engineers and architects hired by Lord Midleton, including Decimus Burton (1843-1850) and Nathaniel Jackson (1885-c.1890). Lord Midleton owned much of the town at that time.

The convex curve of the street leading into Casement Square [16] is reflected by the concave curve of the Crescent [7] above. Above this, at the top of the steep hill and dominating the skyline, the gothic revival cathedral [21] is a bold contrast. Within the town the architectural transmission from neo-classical to neo-gothic is less stark, and the visitor is instead impressed by the quality of the workmanship in the town's public buildings. It is noticeable that the formal facades of these buildings face the Harbour. Cobh, in the 1800s, was a vibrant port, gaining wealth and fame from the thousands of ships that docked here each year. During the American War of Independence, and again during the wars with France between 1776 and 1815, Cobh was used as a muster port for merchant convoys and this was one of the main impetuses for the town's development.

Mr and Mrs Hall, travel writers who visited Cobh in 1843, recall 'it was no unusual sight to behold.... three hundred sail of merchant vessels assembled waiting for convoy... all gaiety, the steady officers, the light-hearted and thoughtless middies, and the jolly Jack-tars paraded up and down at all hours'. By the 1860s the Cunard Line had established an office in the town, followed in the 1870s by the White Star Line, both of whom played a key role in transporting many Irish emigrants to a new life. The train station opened in 1862 (replaced by the present building in 1888-90) and would have been busy with regular tourists and travellers bound for distant shores. Hotels like the imposing Commodore vied for trade, with smaller lodging houses taking the less well off.

The Victorian era saw a boom in day trippers. The town responded with the creation of leisure facilities like the Cobh Public Baths, open in 1896. Visitors could walk on the new promenade or relax at the bandstand or around the maypoles in the park.

COBH
Historic Town Map

Produced by
CORK COUNTY COUNCIL
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