

## **PENDENNIS CASTLE**

### **Castle Drive, Falmouth, Cornwall TR11 4LP**

#### **5<sup>th</sup> September 2012**

We visited Pendennis Castle after having visited St Mawes Castle in the morning and I feel this was a disservice to Pendennis, as it was a hot day and I for one was feeling slightly jaded. I am therefore determined to re-visit Pendennis Castle in its own right at a future date, but for now will delve into the history, so I can walk around with some background knowledge for once!



**Side view of Pendennis Castle**

Like its sister castle at St Mawes, Pendennis Castle was built between 1539 and 1545, in the latter years of King Henry VIII's reign, when England was at risk of invasion from Catholic Europe. Henry had incurred their collective wrath by attempting to annul his long-standing marriage to Catherine of Aragon, in order to marry Anne Boleyn. It was understandable, seeing that Catherine of Aragon's nephew was Charles V of Spain, the Holy Roman Emperor, that this move was taken as a personal insult and demanded retribution.

France and the Holy Roman Empire declared an alliance against Henry in 1538, with Pope Paul III encouraging the two countries to attack England. Henry's response was to issue an order (a 'device' programme) in 1539 for a series of artillery forts to be constructed along the English coastline – hence the occasionally used term of Device Forts. These were equipped with guns to deal with enemy warships and troop transports.

Traditionally, the Crown had a habit of leaving coastal defences to local communities and their lords, with basic defences in the south-west and Sussex coastlines consisting mainly of towers and blockhouses. As there was often much more unrest in northern England, the situation there was somewhat different, with fortifications generally more impressive. Perhaps...

On the south coast of Cornwall, the Carrick Roads refers to a deep estuary at the mouth of the River Fal. It was an important anchorage that served shipping from the Atlantic and the Mediterranean and a perfect place for an enemy to establish a base. In 1539, a small gun tower known as the Little Dennis blockhouse was built, overlooking the anchorage entrance, with plans to construct five artillery forts. As it turned out, only two were built on opposite shores of the Carrick Roads, at Pendennis and St Mawes, thus allowing overlapping gunfire across the water.

As in other 'Henrician castles', Pendennis had a circular design that allowed all-round fire from the guns mounted at several levels. It was built at a cost of £5,614 on the land of John Killigrew, who was a member of the local Cornish gentry. It's considered most likely that he oversaw the construction of the fort and was appointed its first captain. However, while St Mawes had a significant amount of effort put into its construction, with good-quality stone and decorative carvings, Pendennis was a simple round gate and tower enclosed by a lower curtain wall.

The initial threat of invasion passed when peace was made with France in 1558, although the Spanish threat to south-west England became more intense and war broke out in 1569. Resulting from this, a defensive earthwork was built to the north-west of the castle to protect it from a land attack, while another gun battery was added alongside the blockhouse, facing the river.



**Guns, guns, guns...**

As for the garrison at Pendennis in this period, the amount of men varied according to the level of imminent threat. It was fully garrisoned by up to 100 men during the planned Spanish invasions of 1574, 1579, 1588 (the famous Spanish Armada) and 1596-7, although more men could be mustered from the local community if necessary. In 1599, for instance, Pendennis was reportedly guarded by 200 soldiers.

In 1593, raiding parties destroyed the family home of the Killigrew family's home at Arwenack and in 1595, four Spanish ships attacked coastal towns in what is referred to as the raid on Mounts Bay. In 1597, a Spanish fleet with 20,000 men intended to land troops at Pendennis and capture the Carrick Roads. Bad weather fortuitously saved the day, but the failed attack forced Queen Elizabeth I to review the situation at Pendennis.

It was recommended that the castle's defences be extended significantly. As a result, a military engineer named Paul Ive set about surrounding the original Henrician castle with a ring of earthworks, bastions, embrasures and a ditch supported by stone revetments – revetments being sloping structures formed to secure an area from artillery damage, etc. This is another new word I have learned, which is one reason why I like to write about castle visits! In this case, the work was carried out between 1597 and 1600 by a team of 400 local workers.

By 1600, the newly extended fortress had the capability of defending the whole of Pendennis headland. It was in the shape of an elongated pentagon, defined by a high rampart and the previously mentioned ditch, with a bastion projecting at each angle. Since I'm currently into definitions, a bastion is a projection built at an angle to the line of a wall, in order to allow defensive fire in several directions.

A large area of the new fortress, triangular in shape, overlooked Pendennis Point. A smaller fort there included the original gun tower known as Little Dennis. The bastions were equipped with heavy guns to defend the fort from attack by land and sea. However, England was at peace in the early 1600s and Pendennis was neglected.

The Killigrew family had controlled the castle for several decades, with John Killigrew's son and then grandson taking on the role of captain until 1605. The garrison's pay was reported to be two years in arrears, with the men being forced to eat limpets collected from the shoreline, which doesn't particularly put the Killigrews in a good light. Despite this state of affairs, an Italian-style gatehouse was added to the castle in around 1611.



**Little Dennis**

The Thirty Years' War took place, primarily in central Europe, during the years 1618-1648. War with Spain broke out again in 1624 and between 1625 and 1630, England attempted to influence the outcome of the war, mainly by its opposition to Spain. Pendennis once again required improvements and in 1627, a new rampart and ditch (known as the Hornwork) was built across the peninsula, replacing the Tudor version and strengthening land defences to the north.

The crisis passed, but the captains of Pendennis and St Mawes frequently disagreed about rights to search and detain incoming shipping, with both sides arguing that the traditional right to do so was theirs. The situation came to a head in 1630, when a legal dispute broke out that was eventually resolved when the Admiralty issued a compromise that both castles share the job.

In 1642, when civil war broke out in England between King Charles I and Parliament, Pendennis and the south-west of England were Royalist. The expanding town of Falmouth was an important port for King Charles I's army. When the war turned in favour of the Parliamentarians, plans were made to shelter Prince Charles (the son of King Charles I) at the castle during the winter of 1645-46, although he only stayed briefly in early 1646.

Not long after Prince Charles left Pendennis for the Isles of Scilly at the beginning of March, Thomas Fairfax (3<sup>rd</sup> Lord Fairfax of Cameron and Parliamentary commander-in-chief during the Civil War) arrived in Cornwall with a substantial army. By then, nearly all other Royalist positions had fallen and St Mawes Castle surrendered as soon as Fairfax approached. The comparison between Pendennis and St Mawes is interesting, but I mean nothing judgmental about that.

Meanwhile in Pendennis Castle however, 1,000 soldiers were under the command of Sir John Arundell (born in about 1566 at Trevice, near Newquay), who declared that he would die rather than surrender. Since he was around 80 years old at the time, he didn't have all that much to lose - unlike his soldiers, who presumably had no choice - and neither did their dependents. He was assisted by Henry Killigrew, a Member of Parliament (which seems a little odd?)

Parliamentary forces set up headquarters at Arwenack House in Falmouth, the burnt-out home of the Killigrew family destroyed in 1593 by Spanish raiders. They bombarded the castle from the land, while fresh supplies were prevented from arriving by a flotilla of ten ships out at sea. The garrison's defences had been supported with artillery fire from a Royalist warship, but this was deliberately run aground to the north of the castle and served as an additional gun platform.

The garrison was eventually reduced to eating horse and dog meat. By July, food was so short that some of the garrison tried unsuccessfully to break out by sea to obtain supplies and on 15<sup>th</sup> August, Sir John Arundell agreed to an honourable surrender, Pendennis being the penultimate Royalist stronghold to hold out - the final one being Raglan Castle). Around 900 survivors left Pendennis Castle two days later, although some were terminally ill from malnutrition.



Parliament kept a garrison at Pendennis, but in 1647 it cut back on the armed forces across the country, offering soldiers who lost their posts two months' pay. Quite unfairly, those at Pendennis were offered only one month's pay, to which insult the garrison mutinied under the leadership of Colonel Richard Fortescue. They seized the unfortunate visiting Parliamentary commissioners and refused to leave Pendennis until their additional pay was granted. Parliament negotiated and the garrison granted their full dues. Colonel Fortescue (no doubt branded a troublemaker) was found employment elsewhere and another smaller garrison was installed.

A short while before King Charles II was restored to the throne in 1660, the Royalist Sir Peter Killigrew became the new captain of Pendennis Castle. Continuing warfare with the Dutch and the French resulted in an additional gun battery being constructed at Crab Quay, at the south-east of the main fortification. In about 1700, a new guard barracks and gateway were built.



**Garrison life from earlier days**

Coastal defences were reviewed in 1714, when Colonel Christian Lilly stated that Pendennis was neglected and "in a very ruinous condition." The parapets had collapsed, the ramparts could be scaled quite easily and the ditches were full of brambles. His recommended repairs were slow to materialise and it wasn't until 1732-1739 that the interior was re-designed, the old ramparts were re-formed, new 18-pounder cannons were installed and new buildings constructed, including gunners' barracks, a storehouse and a gunpowder magazine.

From 1775-1780, during the American War of Independence, France declared itself allied with the revolutionaries, thus causing war with Britain to break out in 1778. Pendennis Castle was garrisoned with a locally formed Miners' Militia and new barracks were built.

During the Napoleonic Wars of 1793-1815, Falmouth became an important military depot and the Pendennis garrison became permanent. The Crown bought the land from the Killigrew family and made several improvements. The defences were strengthened with five raised gun batteries (known as cavaliers) on the landward rampart, while a new sea battery, called Half Moon Battery, was erected outside the fort to the south. A number of store buildings, barracks and a hospital were constructed inside the fort and outside to the north on Hornwork Common.

At this time, the castle was equipped with up to 48 guns, while a new artillery unit of volunteers was formed in Falmouth in order to support fortifications around the harbour. Many of the volunteers were trained at Pendennis before being deployed elsewhere in Cornwall.

However, at the end of the Napoleonic wars, Pendennis was neglected, with many of the guns becoming unusable and many of the temporary buildings being removed. The old post of captain was finally abolished in 1837, changing to the command of a conventional military appointment.



**An inside display of gunners in action**

The rise and fall of Pendennis continued in the 1850s, when England and France were rivals in the battle to gain military and naval advantage, as Falmouth continued to be an important harbour. Nineteen 32- and 56-pounder (14.5 and 24.5 kg) guns were installed from the year 1854, particularly at Half Moon Battery and at Crab Quay, at the east side of the headland.

During a nationwide programme of fort building in the 1860s, Pendennis was considered less of a risk than other coastal locations, although its outdated defences were gradually improved from 1880-1900. Military technology had advanced dramatically and an up-to-date electronically operated minefield was laid across the entrance to the Carrick Roads in 1885, with mines that could be remotely detonated and were jointly controlled from Pendennis and St Mawes. They had presumably moved on from their historic rivalry!

As a result of Falmouth's designation as a Defended Port in 1887, many new and different defences for the estuary were commanded from Pendennis Castle. Breech-loading guns replaced the now outdated, muzzle-loading guns; searchlights aided fighting at night; and electricity and telephones allowed for more efficient communication. Six-inch guns (firing shells with a six-inch diameter) were installed to engage warships, while quick-firing 6- and 12-pounder guns (2.7 and 5.44 kg) were intended to deal with fast torpedo boats.

Such complex defences needed permanent staff and in 1902 the 105<sup>th</sup> Regiment Royal Garrison Artillery took over the manning of Pendennis Castle. Yet another new barracks was built for them and a War Signal Station was constructed on the roof of the original Henrician fort, to co-ordinate shipping movements. Sadly, the 16<sup>th</sup>-century guardhouse alongside the keep was demolished. It's true that the old needs to make way for the new, but sometimes it feels like a loss.

Twelve years later and World War I (1914-18) catapulted millions of people into unprecedented times. At Pendennis, the castle was the command centre of coast artillery defences for the west of Cornwall. It was reinforced by soldiers from the Territorial Force and additional defences were constructed on the landward side, with protection from key defence points and trenches. Thousands of troops came for training before heading to France and Belgium, while the Royal Navy used the anchorage for anti-submarine vessels, minesweepers and convoys.

After the war, Pendennis was still used to train gunners, but in 1920, its 16<sup>th</sup>-century buildings were handed over to the guardianship of the Ministry of Works. At the start of World War II in 1939, however, it resumed control of coastal defences. Twin 6- and 12-pounder guns countered the threat from torpedo boats, while guns in new covered positions at Half Moon Battery gave long-range defence against ships. From 1943, these were the latest radar-controlled 6-inch (152 mm) Mark 24 models that could operate with precision.

Temporary buildings and huts were added across the site and zig-zag trenches dug for protection. The 16<sup>th</sup>-century fort became the headquarters of Falmouth Fire Command, from which the Fire Commander could manage all the guns across the area. A Battery Plotting Room was also set up in order to co-ordinate target data coming in from all sources.

Falmouth was able to play a significant role supporting the D-Day invasion of France in June 1944 and during the preparations, Pendennis played its part when its gun batteries were used to defend against German E-boats. After the war had ended in 1945, Pendennis Castle continued to be used for training until 1956, when the Coast Artillery branch of the Army was disbanded.

The following year, the castle was returned to the guardianship of Ministry of Works, who prepared to open it to the public. Attention was focused on the 16<sup>th</sup>-century castle and many of the more modern military buildings were cleared away. Between 1963 and 2000, the barracks were used as a Youth Hostel and in 1984, English Heritage took over the castle, placing a greater priority on the conservation of its more modern features.

In the 1990s, extensive work was carried out to refurbish the fortifications, along with archaeological surveys and excavations – which is always a good move to my mind. Along with investigating the old, new facilities were opened for visitors. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the old sergeant's mess and the custodian's house were converted into holiday cottages.

Pendennis Castle continues to be a popular tourist attraction, while the heritage agency Historic England describes it as "...one of the finest examples of a post-medieval defensive promontory fort in the country." This seems a fair assessment, as it stands proudly dominating its rocky headland, having adapted for over four centuries to intermittent changing methods of warfare amid frequent threats of invasion. I can't wait to visit again with fresh eyes, more historical understanding and of course, my digital camera 😊



**Somebody left some boots behind...**