

Pendennis Castle



Pendennis Castle has defended the anchorage of the Carrick Roads for over 450 years. In the late 1530's Henry VIII was under threat of war from France and Spain because he had divorced his Catholic wife, Catherine of Aragon. As a consequence, Henry set about the fortification of the whole of England's south coast. Between the years 1540 and 1545, the River Fal, had two forts constructed to guard its wide entrance - St Mawes on the east bank and Pendennis on the west.

During the reign of Elizabeth I, an extra wall was constructed - encircling the structure, and bastions were built at Pendennis. In the year 1595, the Spanish attacked Mounts Bay - Newlyn and Penzance. The garrisons at Pendennis and St Mawes, were hurriedly reinforced and improved in preparation for the coming Spanish Invasion. However the Spanish invasion never came and the only attacks on the castles were from the English during the Civil War.

The historic siege of Pendennis Castle began in 1646 when Parliamentary forces attacked the fortress from both land and sea. They quickly cut the castle's lines of communication and supplies with trenches and gun positions, running from Gyllyngvase on the west across to the area that currently is occupied by the docks. Cromwell's Roundheads set up headquarters in Falmouth at Arwenack House, the burnt out home to the Killigrew family. The Garrison at Pendennis under the command of the 80 year old Sir John Arundel and assisted by Sir Henry Killigrew (Member of Parliament), held out for six months, being reduced to eating horse and dog meat before their final surrender to the Parliamentarian force. Pendennis had been the penultimate stronghold, after Raglan Castle in the country to hold out for the King, after earlier giving sanctuary to Queen Henrietta Maria, and the Prince of Wales (Charles II), before their escape to France. The location of the castle high on the hill overlooking the surrounding area and town gave the defenders a great advantage, enabling them to hold out for so long against the Parliamentarian force. St Mawes, on the opposite bank was in a weaker position strategically - built half way up the hill, purely as as a seaward deterrent, the castle had no defence from a land based attack. The governor at St Mawes immediately surrendered to the Parliamentarian forces. Both forts were part of Britain's coastal defence system during both World Wars.

In the month of November 1717, Pendennis Castle received great injury from a thunder-storm: the lightning struck through the walls of the building, which are eight or nine feet thick, removing stones, as it was said, of five or six hundred weight; and so far damaged the fort, as to render it for a time indefensible.