

= Old Blockhouse =

The Old Blockhouse , also known as the Dover Fort , is a 16th @-@ century fortification on the island of Tresco in the Isles of Scilly . It was built between 1548 and 1551 by the government of Edward VI to protect the islands against French attack .

Overlooking Old Grimsby harbour and the anchorage of St Helen 's Pool , the blockhouse would have housed a battery of two or three artillery pieces , positioned on a square gun platform on top of a rocky outcrop . An earthwork bank and a stone wall were built to protect it from attack from the beach and the landward sides respectively . A small room to provide living quarters for the garrison was later constructed on the side of the gun platform .

During the interregnum following the English Civil War , the Old Blockhouse was occupied by the Royalists and it was attacked by the Parliamentary forces of Sir Robert Blake in 1651 . Blake 's naval guns out @-@ ranged those of the fort , and , after fierce fighting , the blockhouse was taken . A battery of guns was maintained at the blockhouse until at least the 1750s , but by the end of the 18th century the fortification was disused and in ruins .

After 1922 the blockhouse was placed into the guardianship of the state by the lessee of the island , Arthur Dorrien @-@ Smith , and in the 21st century it is controlled by English Heritage and open to tourists . It is protected as a scheduled monument under UK law .

= = History = =

= = = 16th century = = =

The Old Blockhouse was built between 1548 and 1551 to protect the Scilly Isles against French attack . Tensions with France had grown during the reign of Henry VIII and spilled over into war in 1538 . Henry initially responded by fortifying the coasts of England , constructing new artillery forts designed to defend against the longer @-@ range cannons that were becoming common in the 16th century . Henry 's son , the nine @-@ year @-@ old Edward VI , inherited the throne in 1547 , facing renewed war with France . Edward Seymour was made the Lord Protector to the King , and he appointed his brother , Thomas , as England 's Lord Admiral . Thomas inspected the Scilly Isles personally and concluded that they were vulnerable to a French invasion .

As a result of the inspection , Sir Francis Flemming , the Lieutenant @-@ General of the Ordnance , was tasked in February 1558 to improve the defences on the islands , supported by a shipment of lead to help with construction , and money raised from the dissolution of the monasteries in England . The building work initially focused on the island of Tresco and was carried out under the direction of John Killigrew , the captain of Pendennis Castle in Falmouth . Tresco was in need of modern defences , but Killigrew also wanted to use the work programme to increase his political influence on the island .

The Old Blockhouse was built as part of this programme of work . The blockhouse was positioned on high ground to protect the Old Grimsby harbour , overlooking both the harbour and the nearby anchorage of St Helen 's Pool . When complete , it would have held a battery of two to three guns , which could have fired on targets attempting to enter the harbour , or engaged ships approaching the Scilly Isles from the north @-@ east .

Edward Seymour fell from power in 1549 , and after his removal a new survey was carried out by Captain William Tyrell , in part to confirm that the new fortifications were suitably located across the islands . Building work across the Scilly Isles continued , expanding to include the neighbouring island of St Mary 's , and at least 540 oak trees from South Wales were dispatched to the islands in early 1550 , since the islands lacked suitable sources of timber of their own . Orders were given in 1551 to send bows , arrows and the ingredients required to make gunpowder to the islands , where construction teams were kept at work through to the end of 1552 .

The Old Blockhouse appears to have been completed , but the Crown 's resources had become badly stretched and the decision was taken at the end of 1552 to curtail further expenditure on the

Scilly Isles . Between 1548 and 1552 , a total of £ 3 @, @ 123 had been spent on improving the fortifications on the islands ; a 1579 survey suggested that , with the cost of the garrisons , the project had come to a total of £ 6 @, @ 000 . Edward 's successor , Queen Mary I , intended to establish a garrison of 150 soldiers on the islands , but it is uncertain if these numbers were ever achieved .

= = = 17th century = = =

The Old Blockhouse saw military action in 1651 during the interregnum after the end of the English Civil War , making it one of the very few of England 's coastal defences to have ever seen actual fighting . The Scilly Isles were supporters of Charles I during the civil war , and after a short period in Parliamentary control rebelled in favour of Charles in 1648 . Tresco formed a base for Royalists privateers and Parliament became concerned that the Dutch , then hostile to England , might counter the piracy by occupying the islands , gaining a foothold they could then use against England . In 1651 Parliament sent Sir Robert Blake in charge of a naval task force to retake the islands .

Blake arrived at St Helen 's Pool in April 1651 and set about taking the island of Tresco , attacking the harbour of Old Grimsby and the blockhouse . Blake deployed a force of men in small boats , but they landed on the wrong island and had to be recalled to the ships . The next day the men landed on the beaches below the blockhouse ; fighting ensued and the attackers were driven back . Blake 's men made another landing which also saw fierce resistance , and the guns of the blockhouse were probably turned on the landing parties . Around 15 of the assault force were killed , but the guns of Blake 's ships had a longer range than those of the blockhouse and Old Grimsby fell . Blake went on to use Tresco as a basis for taking St Mary 's .

The blockhouse remained an important fortification after the invasion . Parliament invested £ 1 @, @ 050 in the islands ' defences and carried out a survey in 1652 , calling the blockhouse the " Dover Fort . In 1660 , Charles II was restored to the throne and Edward Sherburne was sent to the Scilly Isles to inspect the defences ; he recommended that repairs be carried out to the Old Blockhouse .

= = = 18th @-@ 21st centuries = = =

The Crown , in the form of the Duchy of Cornwall , leased the islands in 1687 to the Godolphin family , followed by August Smith in 1831 . The blockhouse was inspected by Christian Lilly in 1715 , on the orders of the Duke of Marlborough ; he reported that it was " very much decayed " , with only the walls standing , but recommended that it be repaired at a cost of £ 28 . The antiquary William Borlase noted during his 1752 visit that there was a battery of guns at the Old Blockhouse , guarding the harbour , but by the time that the writer John Troutbeck saw the site at the end of the century , the guns had been removed . The blockhouse walls remained in good condition , however , and Troutbeck considered that it would still have military utility if brought back into service .

In 1922 , the lease passed to Arthur Dorrien @-@ Smith , who agreed to pass several properties on Tresco , including the blockhouse , into the guardianship of the Ministry of Works . In the 21st century , the blockhouse is controlled by English Heritage , the successor to the ministry , and open to tourists . It is protected as a scheduled monument under UK law .

= = Architecture = =

The Old Blockhouse comprises a paved , square gun platform , approximately 7 metres (23 ft) by 6 @. @ 5 metres (21 ft) , with 1 metre (3 ft 3 in) thick , low granite walls , which were probably somewhat taller when they were first built . It is built on top of a rocky outcrop , which forms part of the lower courses of the walls , and is reached by a flight of stairs . The platform originally had embrasures on the north @-@ west and north @-@ east corners , with the walls probably forming a parapet , although it is possible there may also have been a roof to the platform .

In the south @-@ west corner of the platform is a lean @-@ to , which may have been either a

powder locker or a shelter for the blockhouse watch ; a compartment in the south wall might have also been used to store ammunition . A small room , 2 @. @ 8 metres (9 ft 2 in) by 3 @. @ 6 metres (12 ft) , was added on to the west , after the construction of the main building , possibly during the English Civil War . This was equipped with windows and a fireplace , and would have formed living quarters for the troops .

An earthwork bank defends the landward side of the blockhouse , described variously as between around 0 @. @ 5 metres (1 ft 8 in) and 2 metres (6 ft 7 in) high , similar to those found around forts of this period along the Thames River in England . There are also the remains of a defensive stone wall on the seaward side of the blockhouse , although much of the wall has been destroyed by coastal erosion .

The design of the blockhouse is conservative for the period , and echoes that of the forts built during the reign of Henry VIII . This is in contrast to the nearby fortification of Harry 's Walls , built at the same time as the blockhouse , but which adopted a more contemporary design that employed bastions .