

= Battle of Bonchurch =

The Battle of Bonchurch took place sometime in late July 1545 at Bonchurch on the Isle of Wight . No source of information states a specific date , although it could have happened on 21 July . The battle was a part of the wider Italian War of 1542 ? 1546 , and took place during the 1545 French invasion of the Isle of Wight . Several landings were made by the French during the invasion of the Isle of Wight , including the one at Bonchurch . The two combatants were the Kingdom of England and the Kingdom of France . England won the battle , and the French advance across the Isle of Wight was halted .

The battle was fought between French regular soldiers , and English militiamen . The number of French soldiers involved is believed to be around 500 . The number of English militiamen is uncertain , with one source of information stating 300 , and another stating 2800 . English forces at the battle are understood to have been commanded by Captain Robert Fysshier , whilst French forces engaged were commanded by Le Seigneur de Tais . The battle was one of several that were fought between the English and the French on the Isle of Wight . The majority of sources of information regarding the battle state that the English won , although one source of information states that the French were victorious . The battle was fought because it was part of the French attempt to cause enough damage to the Isle of Wight to force the English ships standing off the coast of England to leave their defensive positions and attack in conditions favourable to the French . The landing at Bonchurch was one of several made by the French on the Isle of Wight , with others taking place at Sandown , Bembridge and St Helens .

= = Background = =

The Italian War of 1542 @-@ 1546 occurred because the disputes between the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V and Francis I of France had not been settled by the Italian War of 1535 @-@ 1538 , and those disputes resulted in a war between France , aided by the Ottoman Empire and Jülich @-@ Cleves @-@ Berg , and the Holy Roman Empire , aided by the Kingdom of England , Spain , Saxony , and Brandenburg . After two years of fighting Charles V , and Henry VIII of the Kingdom of England , invaded France . In September 1544 , English forces captured Boulogne . France attempted to re @-@ capture the city by force , but failed . Peace talks to end the fighting between England and France did not yield any positive results , partly because Henry VIII refused to consider returning Boulogne . As a result of the failure of diplomacy to get back Boulogne for France , Francis I decided to invade England , hoping that Henry VIII would return Boulogne to France in return for French forces leaving England . Thirty thousand French troops and a fleet of some 400 vessels were assembled . The fleet left Le Havre , in France , on 16 July .

On 18 July , the hostile engagement of French and English ships by the English coast marked the beginning of the Battle of the Solent . On that day , the outnumbered English ships withdrew . The English hoped to lure the French ships into the shallows and narrow channels of the Spithead , but the French wanted to attack the English in the more open waters of the eastern Spithead where the English ships could be encircled and annihilated . To entice the English ships to abandon their defensive position , and engage the numerically greater French ships , the French decided to invade the Isle of Wight , burning buildings and crops . France hoped that the residents of the Isle of Wight would support them , and rebel against England , and that the Isle of Wight could be used as a base to challenge the English . French troops landed on the Isle of Wight , on 21 July . England would oppose this invasion of the Isle of Wight .

The Hundred Years War had resulted in the society which existed on the Isle of Wight being very militarised . Every male adult was obligated to fight when needed , and they participated in regular military training . The Captain of the Isle of Wight , Sir Richard Worsley of Appuldurcombe House , is considered to have been a ? capable and energetic commander ? . He was assisted by Sir Edward Bellingham , an officer in the regular English army , along with a headquarters staff . The English militiamen were equipped with " long pikes topped with a bill hook , and daggers , knives and clubs for close fighting " , as well as the Welsh longbow . The French soldiers were equipped with firearms

, and steel blades . The militiamen had the advantage of superior morale , speed and agility .

The plan for the advance of the French soldiers at Bonchurch may have been to burn Wroxall and Appuldurcombe , capture and consolidate a position on the heights of St. Boniface Down , and then move towards Sandown to link up with a French landing there . The area around Bonchurch became important in its own right because Dunnose Point , near Bonchurch , offered a safe anchorage for French ships . There were also sources of fresh water nearby that could be used by the soldiers and sailors of the fleet .

= = Prelude = =

French troops were landed at three locations on the coast of the Isle of Wight , and the total number of French soldiers who were landed was 2000 . Bonchurch was one of the three places where French troops landed , and the number of soldiers who landed at Bonchurch is believed to be around 500 . The landing was unopposed and the French forces began to advance inland , up steep thickly wooded slopes . The Isle of Wight militia , however , learnt about the French invasion very quickly . 300 soldiers of the militia , under the command of Captain Robert Fysshier , were waiting at St. Boniface Down for the French to advance from Monks Bay .

= = Battle = =

Reports of the fighting are confused , and therefore no fully comprehensive account of the battle has been agreed upon . However , the battle could have taken place at dawn (the day of the battle is unknown) , and lasted until midday . Some records of the battle say that some women of the Isle of Wight participated in the battle by shooting arrows at the French .

= = Did the French win the battle ? = = =

One source of information states that the French won the battle at Bonchurch . This source says that the English forces opposing the French were not local militiamen , but militiamen from Hampshire . The English forces took up a defensive position , a fact which is agreed upon by another account of the fighting , and were flanked by cliffs and screened by woods . According to this account , the number of English troops was 2 @, @ 800 . The first French attack was repelled but Le Seigneur de Tais , commander of the French forces involved in the battle , rallied his troops . A second French attack against the English forces was launched , with the French forces arranged into the ' array ' fighting formation . The account concludes its description of the fighting by saying that , after heavy casualties were sustained by both sides , the English line broke and the militia routed as a result of the second attack by the French . The account also states that Captain Robert Fysshier , which another source of information states commanded the English forces during the battle , is reported to have shouted out , as the militia routed , offering £ 100 for anyone who could bring him a horse , because he was too fat to run . A quote by Sir John Oglander is recorded , which reads that ? but none could be had even for a kingdom ? . The captain was never heard from again , and the account states that he was either killed , or captured and then buried at sea .

= = Aftermath = =

The casualties for both sides were heavy . The battle resulted in the French invasion of the Isle of Wight being stopped . Another skirmish took place at Bonchurch several days after the battle , when English forces engaged with French men who had disembarked from French ships retreating from Portsmouth looking for water . A senior French commander , Chevalier D 'Aux , was killed as a result of the engagement . The English victory at Bonchurch only had a marginal impact on the course of the Italian War of 1542 @-@ 1546 , because the battle only involved a very small number of men relative to the numbers of men that were engaged throughout the entirety of the war . The fact that it only had a marginal impact is also because , if the French had captured the Isle of Wight ,

it is unlikely that that capture would have drastically affected the course of the war , because there were more significant territories that were being contested . The Isle of Wight could have been used to support French operations against England had it been captured ; Claude d 'Annebault , commander of the French armada , recorded that ? having it [the Isle of Wight] under our control , we [the French] could then dominate Portsmouth ... and so put the enemy to extraordinary expense in maintaining a standing army and navy to contain us . ? Although some sources do state that the victory at Bonchurch was responsible for the French withdrawal from the Isle of Wight , the source of information which states that the French won the battle says that fighting at Bembridge was what drove the French from the island .