

= Cowes Castle =

Cowes Castle , also known as West Cowes Castle , is a Device Fort in Cowes on the Isle of Wight . Originally built by Henry VIII in 1539 to protect England against the threat of invasion from France and the Holy Roman Empire , it comprised a circular bastion , flanking wings and a keep , and in 1547 it housed 17 pieces of artillery . With its companion fortification at East Cowes , the castle overlooked the entrance to the River Medina , an important anchorage . The invasion threat passed but the fortification continued in use until the middle of the 19th century , very briefly seeing action in 1642 during the English Civil War .

Decommissioned in 1854 , the castle was first leased , and later bought outright , by the Royal Yacht Squadron to form their new clubhouse . The Squadron then employed the architect Anthony Salvin to rebuild large parts of it between 1856 and 1858 . It became the headquarters for part of the D @-@ Day invasion force during the Second World War , but has otherwise remained in use by the Squadron and is a distinctive landmark in yacht races along the Isle of Wight .

= = History = =

= = = 16th century = = =

Cowes Castle was built as a consequence of international tensions between England , France and the Holy Roman Empire in the final years of the reign of King Henry VIII . Traditionally the Crown had left coastal defences to the local lords and communities , only taking a modest role in building and maintaining fortifications , and while France and the Empire remained in conflict with one another , maritime raids were common but an actual invasion of England seemed unlikely . Modest defences , based around simple blockhouses and towers , existed in the south @-@ west and along the Sussex coast , augmented by a few more impressive works in the north of England , but in general the fortifications were very limited in scale .

In 1533 , Henry broke with Pope Paul III to annul the long @-@ standing marriage to his wife , Catherine of Aragon , and remarry . Catherine was the aunt of Charles V , the Holy Roman Emperor , and he took the annulment as a personal insult . This resulted in France and the Empire declaring an alliance against Henry in 1538 , and the Pope encouraging the two countries to attack England . An invasion of England appeared certain . In response , Henry issued an order , called a " device " , in 1539 , giving instructions for the " defence of the realm in time of invasion " and the construction of forts along the English coastline .

The Solent , a stretch of water that gave access to the ports of Southampton and Portsmouth , was considered vulnerable to attack . Two castles were built on the west and east sides of the River Medina , the entrance to the principal harbour of the adjacent Isle of Wight , and were intended to attack any enemy ships that might approach . The castles took their names from the traditional term for this location , " the Cowes " . Constructed in 1539 , the western fortification , which became known as West Cowes Castle , had a D @-@ shaped bastion at the front , a round , two @-@ storey keep at the rear and two low buildings on either side , all of which mounted artillery guns . The landward side was protected by a ditch 4 metres ( 13 ft ) wide and a stone wall at least 2 @-@ 4 metres ( 7 ft 10 in ) wide at the top . It was built from limestone ashlar stone , which may have been recycled from the demolition of nearby Beaulieu Abbey , a consequence of Henry 's recent dissolution of the monasteries .

Settlements grew up around both castles on the Medina , but East Cowes Castle was rapidly abandoned and ultimately destroyed by coastal erosion ; as a result , today West Cowes Castle is often simply referred to as Cowes Castle . Inspections in 1547 showed that there were 17 iron and brass artillery pieces at the fort , but that nine of these were inoperable ; nonetheless it continued in use as a fortification after the original invasion scare had ended , staffed with a garrison of a captain , porter and three gunners during Queen Elizabeth 's reign .

== 17th ? 19th centuries ==

Cowes Castle was used to house important visitors to the Isle of Wight and also as a prison ; the captain of the castle had further responsibilities for managing the arrival of foreign vessels . When the English Civil War broke out in 1642 between the supporters of Charles I and Parliament , the castle was initially held for the King by its captain , Humphrey Turney . On 12 August , as tensions between the rival factions on the island increased , Turney personally fired one of the castle 's guns at the nearby Parliamentary naval vessel Lion . An unidentified Scottish naval captain then came ashore on 16 August and captured Turney , before landing more men and taking the castle for Parliament , who held it for the rest of the war .

During the Interregnum , the castle continued to be used as a prison . Charles I could not be housed in the castle while en route to his imprisonment by Parliament at Carisbrooke Castle in 1647 because the facility was full , and he stayed at a local alehouse instead . The Royalist Sir William Davenant was imprisoned in Cowes during 1650 , writing the poem Gondibert while incarcerated . As with East Cowes Castle , coastal erosion proved a particular problem for the fortification . An inspection in 1692 reported that the walls were cracked and at risk of collapse , and the antiquarian Francis Grose observed in 1785 that the castle was " strongly fenced with piles and planks " to prevent erosion from the sea .

During the course of the 18th century , Cowes became a fashionable location for visitors , with several bathhouses , one of them located beside the castle , and by the early 19th century the town had become a noted resort . Cowes Castle was partially rebuilt in 1716 to modernise its accommodation . Most of the front of the keep was demolished and rebuilt with new windows , a turret for a spiral staircase was erected , new three- and two @-@ storey residential wings were added , and a garden was created over the landward defences . In 1795 , the writer Richard Warner noted that the garrison consisted of the captain , a porter , two soldiers , a master gunner and five regular gunners , their wages coming to £ 103 a year . The castle remained in use during the Napoleonic Wars , and in 1825 was equipped with eleven 9 @-@ pound ( 4 @. 1 kg ) guns . Warner had already complained , though , that the castle was " utterly useless " in military terms and a guidebook in 1824 echoed this judgement , describing Cowes as " useless as a place of defence " and ridiculing the sentries on duty there .

Lord Anglesey became the captain of Cowes Castle in 1826 , by now a sinecure rather than a regular military appointment , and spent part of each year at the castle , making further , lavish improvements to the interiors . Anglesey was also a member of the Royal Yacht Squadron , first established in 1815 , which then operated from the Gloster Hotel in Cowes . By this time yachting had become a prestigious local event ; the painter J. M. W. Turner sketched the yachts sailing off the castle when he visited in 1827 . When Anglesey died in 1854 the government decommissioned the castle and leased the property initially to Anglesey 's son @-@ in @-@ law Lord Conyngham , and then to the Squadron in 1855 .

The architect Anthony Salvin , an expert on adapting medieval buildings , was employed by the Squadron to remodel the building between 1856 and 1858 . He enlarged the house , altered its profile and built a new tower , platform and a gatehouse , along with a service wing , a ballroom and more accommodation for the members , at a cost of around £ 6 @, @ 000 . Prince Albert and Edward , the Prince of Wales , visited the castle before it was formally reopened in 1858 ; the work received mixed reviews , one local newspaper likening the result to " a discipline establishment " . Cowes became a major centre for yachting . After the destruction of William IV 's miniature frigate the Royal Adelaide in 1877 , its 21 brass cannons were donated to the castle by the Prince of Wales .

== 20th ? 21st centuries ==

Cowes Castle was bought outright from the Crown by the Royal Yacht Squadron in 1917 . Further development work was carried out on the property in the 1920s , and a ballroom in an adjacent hotel was purchased for use as an annexe for female members .

The Isle of Wight became an important staging location for the Allied efforts to invade France during the Second World War . By October 1942 , the castle was occupied by the British Admiralty and became the senior officer 's headquarters of the HQ Naval Commander Force " J " Landing Craft base , known as HMS Vectis . The force 's vessels docked in the nearby Solent , and took part in the D @-@ Day landings . The castle was damaged during the German bombing raids on the island .

After the war , the architect A. G. Biggs carried out substantial additions to the castle between 1962 and 1968 , including remodelling the western range to provide for more female accommodation , using stone from the second East Cowes Castle , an 18th and 19th @-@ century stately home , which had been demolished the previous year . A prefabricated conservatory extension followed in 1988 , and a new pavilion designed by Sir Thomas Croft was added in 2000 .

Archaeological excavations in the winter of 2010 ? 11 rediscovered the remains of the old castle wall and ditch , and more than 400 artefacts were removed for storage at the Isle of Wight County Museum . Cowes Castle is a distinctive landmark in yachting and powerboat events , particularly at the start and finish of local races . It is protected under UK law as a 2 \* Listed Building .