

= Milton Blockhouse =

Milton Blockhouse was an artillery fortification constructed as part of Henry VIII 's Device plan of 1539 , in response to fears of an imminent invasion of England . It was built at Milton , near Gravesend in Kent at a strategic point along the River Thames , and was operational by 1540 . Equipped with 30 pieces of artillery and a garrison of 12 men and a captain , it was probably a two @-@ storey , D @-@ shaped building , designed to prevent enemy ships from progressing further up the river or landing an invasion force . It was stripped of its artillery in 1553 and was demolished between 1557 and 1558 ; nothing remains of the building above ground , although archaeological investigations in the 1970s uncovered parts of the blockhouse 's foundations .

= = Background = =

Milton Blockhouse 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 , playing only 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 , as well as 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 in order 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 now appeared certain .

= = Device of 1539 = =

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 . Under this programme of work the River Thames was protected by a mutually reinforcing network of blockhouses at Gravesend , Milton , and Higham on the south side of the river , and Tilbury and East Tilbury on the opposite bank .

The fortifications were strategically placed . London and the newly constructed royal dockyards of Deptford and Woolwich were vulnerable to seaborne attacks arriving up the Thames estuary , which was then a major maritime route ; 80 percent of England 's exports passed through it . The village of Milton and the adjacent town of Gravesend , only 500 metres (1 @,@ 600 ft) apart , formed a particularly important communications point along the river . They formed the centre of the " Long Ferry " traffic of passengers into the capital , and for the " Cross Ferry " over the river to Tilbury , resulting in the local riverbank becoming lined with wharfs . This was also the first point that an invasion force would be able to easily disembark along the Thames , as before this point the mudflats along the sides of the estuary would have made landings difficult .

= = Construction = =

Milton Blockhouse was designed by the Clerk of the King 's Works , James Nedeham , and the Master of Ordnance , Christopher Morice , with Robert Lorde serving as the paymaster for the project and Lionel Martin , John Ganyng and Mr Travers acting as the local overseers . The fort was built on Chapel Field , which the Crown bought , along with the land for Gravesend Blockhouse , from William Burston for £ 66 ; the field had previously been part of Milton Chantry , dissolved by Henry VIII during the Reformation . The work was quickly completed , and by 1540 the blockhouse was in operation and equipped with 30 artillery guns , 6 handguns and various pikes and longbows .

Initially commanded by Captain Sir Edward Cobham , it had a small garrison of 12 men , including a second in command , a porter , three soldiers and seven gunners ; these men would have been supported by reinforcements if the fort had ever come under attack .

Fresh fears of invasion after 1544 prompted further work being carried out on the blockhouse by Sir Richard Lee , a prominent military engineer , although peace was declared the following year . It is uncertain exactly what shape the fort took ; archaeological investigations suggest that it was probably D @-@ shaped , two storeys tall , with a circular bastion facing the river ; there would have been battery positions on either side of the main defences , and a more modern , angular bastion was added later on the landwards side . By 1546 the King 's accountants estimated that £ 1 @,@ 072 had been spent on building and developing the fortification .

= = Destruction = =

In 1553 , orders were issued for the artillery pieces to be removed from the blockhouse and taken to the Tower of London ; the fort was then demolished between 1557 and 1558 , the brick and stone from the site being reused to repair the Tower . The former site was probably rediscovered during excavations in 1826 , but was destroyed during the building of the Gravesend Canal Basin , Canal Road and the Gordon Pleasure Gardens later in the 19th century . Archaeological investigations between 1973 and 1978 uncovered the foundations of the blockhouse , now protected under UK law as a scheduled monument .