

= King Charles 's Castle =

King Charles 's Castle is a ruined artillery fort overlooking New Grimsby harbour on the island of Tresco in the Isles of Scilly . Built between 1548 and 1551 to protect the islands from French attack , it would have held a battery of guns and an accompanying garrison , designed to prevent enemy vessels from entering the harbour . The castle is polygonal in design , constructed from granite stone , with the gun battery at the front , and a dining room , kitchen and living accommodation at the rear . An additional defensive earthwork was constructed around it during the 17th century . The design of the castle is unusual for the period , and is only seen elsewhere in blockhouses along the River Thames .

The castle 's design was unsatisfactory , as its guns could not be angled so to fire down into the harbour , and its defences were considered vulnerable to attack . To mitigate this , an additional blockhouse was probably constructed below , closer to the water , but eventually a new fortification , the Star Castle , was built instead on the neighbouring island of St Mary 's , which became the main fort in the Scilly Isles . In the aftermath of the English Civil War , the Scilly Isles were held by the Royalist sympathisers of King Charles I , who gave the castle its current name . The islands were then attacked by a Parliamentary force led by Sir Robert Blake in 1651 , who landed on Tresco but bypassed the fort as he took the island . Its Royalist defenders blew up parts of the castle as they left , and some of its stone appears to have been used to build the newer Cromwell 's Castle by the harbour .

Although King Charles 's Castle was being used to house soldiers in 1660 , by the 18th century it was described as ruinous . After 1922 , the castle passed into the guardianship of the Ministry of Works , and archaeological excavations were carried out in 1954 . In the 21st century the site is controlled by English Heritage and is open to visitors . It is protected under UK law as a scheduled monument and a Grade II * listed building .

= = History = =

= = = 16th century = = =

= = = = Construction = = = =

King Charles 's Castle 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 with improving the defences on the islands . Flemming was supported in this effort with a shipment of lead to aid in 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 castle was built as part of this programme of work . It was positioned on the high ground of Castle Down to protect New Grimsby harbour , overlooking the narrow , northern entrance to the harbour . It would have held a battery of guns and an accompanying garrison , designed to prevent enemy vessels from entering the harbour .

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 . At least 540 oak trees from South Wales were dispatched to the islands in early 1550 , as 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 throughout 1552 .

The Old Blockhouse appears to have been completed , but the Crown 's resources had become badly stretched and it was decided 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 . By 1558 , Killigrew held the title of the " captain in the Castell of Tresco " , referring to King Charles 's Castle .

== = Weaknesses == =

It soon became evident that King Charles 's Castle had been built in a poor location . It was 40 metres (130 ft) above sea level and its guns could only fire at enemy ships in the harbour by being angled downwards . Artillery pieces in the 16th century could not fire in this position as the cannonballs would fall out of their muzzles , making the castle much less effective in defending Tresco . By 1554 , a small blockhouse had been built beneath the castle on the future site of Cromwell 's Castle , overlooking the harbour just above the sea level to compensate for this weakness .

The concerns over the castle were significant . Francis Godolphin , who at the time was renting Tresco from the Crown , commented at the end of the century that the castle could not defend the island as " it neither discovereth the whole harbour so through the imminent height thereof can make no good shot so steep downwards " , and also complained about its fortification , " which is worst , is of so weak form as it cannot be defended " . Partially in response to these problems , the new Star Castle was constructed on St Mary 's island between 1593 to 1594 ; a more modern , well @-@ positioned design , Star Castle rapidly became the key defensive site in the Scilly Isles .

== = 17th century == =

The Scilly Isles supported Charles I during the English Civil War , and after a short period in Parliamentary control rebelled in favour of Charles in 1648 . The Royalists on Tresco appeared to have believed that King Charles 's Castle was a critical defensive point on the island and probably built new earthwork defences around the castle to defend it against an attack from the land . It is possible , however , that these defences instead date from around 1627 , and were built by the King 's engineer , Bernard Johnson . During this period the castle was given its current name .

Tresco formed a base for Royalist 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 invading the island of Tresco . Taking the harbour of Old Grimsby in an amphibious assault on 18 April , he then simply bypassed King Charles ' Castle and marched south , using Tresco as a basis for then taking the neighbouring island of St Mary 's .

The Royalist commander of the castle , William Edgecumbe , retreated from the castle on 19 April and the defenders blew up part of the site as they left , leaving the remains to the Parliamentary commander Colonel George Fleetwood . Some of the castle 's stonework appears to have been reused in the construction of the new Cromwell 's Castle by the Parliamentarians , just beneath King

Charles 's Castle , the new fortification being sited in a much better position to defend the harbour .

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 King Charles 's Castle , which was then being used to house soldiers .

= = = 18th ? 21st centuries = = =

The Crown , in the form of the Duchy of Cornwall , leased the islands in 1687 to the Godolphin family , followed by Augustus Smith in 1834 . The antiquary William Borlase was critical of the castle ? by then in ruins ? during his 1752 visit , describing it as a " work of labour and expense , rather than of skill " , and attributing its abandonment to its poor military utility . The writer John Troutbeck , commenting at the end of the century , took a similar perspective , praising the thickness of the walls , but noting that it was ill @-@ positioned to fire into the harbour , unlike its replacement below .

In 1922 , the lease passed to Arthur Dorrien @-@ Smith , who agreed to pass several properties on Tresco , including the castle , into the guardianship of the Ministry of Works . The castle was partially excavated in 1954 , uncovering coins , pottery and a buckle . Parts of the first floor of the battery were reconstructed from the fallen stonework uncovered during the dig .

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 and a Grade II * listed building under UK law .

= = Architecture = =

= = = Buildings = = =

King Charles 's Castle is a polygonal stone building , composed of a gun battery on one side and living quarters on the other . On the west side , overlooking the sea , is a large room which originally contained the battery , with embrasures for five guns . At some point after its initial construction , the north @-@ east gun embrasure was blocked by the construction of an internal chamber within the gun battery , 4 @.@ 5 metres (15 ft) by 2 @.@ 3 metres (7 ft 7 in) , with the embrasure being opened up to form a window .

Behind the battery is a large room , 8 @.@ 8 metres (29 ft) by 6 metres (20 ft) , forming a hall and kitchen , originally for the use of the garrison and containing a fireplace and oven . The room has two bedrooms leading off it , each 2 @.@ 9 metres (9 ft 6 in) square . The north bedroom may have been heated by a small brazier . A guardroom , 3 @.@ 5 metres (11 ft) square , forms the entrance to the building , leading into the hall .

The castle is made from dressed and rubble granite , incorporating an underling rocky outcrop into the design in the north @-@ west and south @-@ west corners . In places the walls survive up to 3 @.@ 4 metres (11 ft) high and 1 @.@ 65 metres (5 ft 5 in) thick , but are on average only 1 @.@ 5 metres (4 ft 11 in) tall and 0 @.@ 8 metres (2 ft 7 in) thick . Opinions vary as to how tall the castle was when first built ; it may have been two storeys high throughout , or may only have been that height in the gun battery , with the living accommodation being a single storey construction . The upper storey of the gun battery would have held additional guns .

Architecturally , the castle is unusual for this period . Its design appears somewhat backward , particularly in comparison to the nearby fortification of Harry 's Walls , built at the same time as the castle , but which adopted a more contemporary design that employed bastions . Its closest equivalents are the blockhouses built by Henry VIII on the River Thames .

= = = Earthworks = = =

The castle is surrounded by a rectangular earthwork , probably built in 1627 , and similar to that at Sandsfoot and Pendennis Castles . It stretches away north @-@ east from the castle , with an earth

and rubble bank up to 2 metres (6 ft 7 in) high and 8 metres (26 ft) wide , with a bastion and demi bastion at its corners and a ditch , up to 0 @. @ 4 metres (1 ft 4 in) deep and 3 metres (9 @. @ 8 ft) wide along the north and east sides .

Another line of earthworks survives around 40 metres (130 ft) south @-@ east of these earthworks ; its bank is 0 @. @ 3 metres (1 ft 0 in) high , with a ditch up to 0 @. @ 2 metres (7 @. @ 9 in) deep . It lies just behind the crest of the hill , possibly for concealment , and is defended with bastions and orillons although it appears not to have been finished . It probably dates from the mid @-@ 16th century , possibly having been built at around the same time as the castle .