

= Upnor Castle =

Upnor Castle is an Elizabethan artillery fort located on the west bank of the River Medway in Kent . It is in the village of Upnor , opposite and a short distance downriver from the Chatham Dockyard , at one time a key naval facility . The fort was intended to protect both the dockyard and ships of the Royal Navy anchored in the Medway . It was constructed between 1559 ? 67 on the orders of Elizabeth I , during a period of tension with Spain and other European powers . The castle consists of a two @-@ storeyed main building protected by a curtain wall and towers , with a triangular gun platform projecting into the river . It was garrisoned by about 80 men with a peak armament of around 20 cannon of various calibres .

Despite its strategic importance , the castle and the defences of the Thames and Medway were badly neglected during the 17th century . The Dutch Republic mounted an unexpected naval raid in June 1667 , and the Dutch fleet was able to breach the defences , capturing two warships and burning others at anchor in the river at Chatham , in one of the worst defeats suffered by the Royal Navy . Upnor Castle acquitted itself better than many of the other defensive sites along the upper Medway , despite its lack of provisioning . Gun fire from the fort and from adjoining emplacements forced a Dutch retreat after a couple of days , before they were able to burn the dockyard itself .

The raid exposed the weaknesses of the Medway defences and led to the castle losing its role as an artillery fortification . New and stronger forts were built further downriver over the following two centuries , culminating in the construction of massive casemated forts such as Garrison Point Fort , Hoo , and Darnet Forts . Upnor Castle became a naval ammunition depot , storing great quantities of gunpowder , ammunition , and cannon to replenish the warships that came to Chatham for repair and resupply . It remained in military use until as late as 1945 . The castle was subsequently opened to the public and is now an English Heritage property .

= = History = =

= = = Strategic context = = =

The River Medway is a major tributary of the Thames , merging at an estuary about 35 miles (56 km) east of London . Its upper reaches from Rochester to the confluence with the Thames at Sheerness meander between sand and mud banks for about 10 miles (16 km) . The water flows slowly without strong currents and is free of rocks , while the surrounding hills provide shelter from the south @-@ west wind . These characteristics made the section of the river below Rochester Bridge a desirable anchorage for large ships , as they could be anchored safely and grounded for repairs . The complexity of the channel 's navigation also provided it with defensive advantages .

During Henry VIII 's reign , the upper Medway gradually became the principal anchorage for ships of the Royal Navy while they were " in ordinary , " or out of commission . They were usually stripped of their sails and rigging while in this state and the opportunity was taken to refit and repair them . Storehouses and servicing facilities were built in the Medway towns of Gillingham and Chatham which eventually became the nucleus of the Chatham Dockyard . By the time Elizabeth I came to the throne in 1558 , most of the royal fleet used this section of the Medway , known as Chatham and Gillingham Reaches , as an anchorage .

Although the Thames had been defended from naval attack since Henry VIII 's time , when five blockhouses were built as part of the Device Forts chain of coastal defences , there were no equivalents on the Medway . Two medieval castles ? Rochester Castle and Queenborough Castle ? existed along the river 's south bank , but both were intended to defend landward approaches and were of little use for defence . There was thus a pressing need for proper defences to protect the vulnerable ships and shore facilities on the upper Medway .

= = = Construction = = =

Upnor Castle was commissioned in 1559 by order of Queen Elizabeth and her Privy Council . Six " indifferent persons " chose a site opposite St Mary 's Creek in Chatham , on 6 acres (24 @, @ 000 m2) of land belonging to a Thomas Devinisshe of Frindsbury . It was acquired by the Crown ? possibly compulsorily purchased ? for the sum of £ 25 . Military engineer Sir Richard Lee was given the task of designing the new fortification , but he appears to have been fully occupied with working on the defences of Berwick @-@ upon @-@ Tweed , and the project was carried out by others to his designs . His deputy Humphrey Locke took the role of overseer , surveyor , and chief carpenter , while Richard Watts , the former Rochester mayor and victualler to the navy , managed the project on a day @-@ to @-@ day basis and handled the accounting .

The castle 's original appearance differed significantly from that of today . The arrow @-@ shaped Water Bastion facing into the Medway and the main block behind it were part of the original design . There were also towers at either end of the water frontage , though these were subsequently replaced by towers of a different design . The gatehouse and moat were later additions . A number of derelict buildings in Rochester Castle , Aylesford , and Bopley were pulled down to provide stone for the castle . The main structure had been completed by 1564 , but it took another three years and an infusion of extra funds to finish the project . The total cost came to £ 4 @, @ 349 .

= = = Improvements and repairs = = =

During the late 16th century , tensions grew between Protestant England and Catholic Spain , leading ultimately to the undeclared Anglo @-@ Spanish War of 1585 ? 1604 . Spain was in a strong position to attack the south of England from its possessions in the Spanish Netherlands . New fortifications were erected along the Medway , including a chain stretched across the width of the river below Upnor Castle . The castle itself was poorly manned until Lord High Admiral Charles Howard , 1st Earl of Nottingham highlighted this and recommended that the garrison should be increased . By 1596 , it was garrisoned by eighty men who were each paid eight pence per day (equivalent to £ 6 today) .

Continued fears of a Spanish incursion led to the castle 's defences being strengthened between 1599 ? 1601 at the instigation of Sir John Leveson . An arrowhead @-@ shaped timber palisade was erected in front of the Water Bastion to block any attempted landings there . An enclosing ditch some 5 @. @ 5 metres (18 ft) deep and 9 @. @ 8 metres (32 ft) wide was dug around the castle . Flanking turrets were constructed to protect the bastion on the site of the present north and south towers . The bastion itself was raised and a high parapet was added to its edge . A gatehouse and drawbridge were also built to protect the castle 's landward side .

A survey conducted in 1603 recorded that Upnor Castle had 20 guns of various calibres , plus another 11 guns split between two sconces or outworks , known as Bay and Warham Sconces . The castle 's armament consisted of a demi @-@ cannon , 7 culverin , 5 demi @-@ culverin , a minion , a falconet , a saker , and four fowlers with two chambers each . Bay Sconce was armed with 4 demi @-@ culverin , while Warham Sconce had 2 culverin and 5 demi @-@ culverin . Eighteen guns were recorded as being mounted in the castle twenty years later . The garrison 's armament included 34 longbows , an indication that archery was still of military value even at this late date . By this time , however , the castle was in a state of disrepair . The drawbridge and its raising mechanism were broken , the gun platforms needed repairs , and the courtyard wall had collapsed . A new curtain wall had to be built to protect the landward side of the castle . The foundations of Warham Sconce were reported to have been washed away by the tide , and it appears that both sconces were allowed to fall into ruin .

Upnor Castle fell into Parliamentary hands without a fight when the English Civil War broke out in 1642 , and was subsequently used to intern Royalist officers . In May 1648 , a Royalist uprising took place in Kent and Essex , with the royalists seizing a number of towns , including Gravesend , Rochester , Dover , and Maidstone . The Royalists were defeated in the Battle of Maidstone on 1 June , and the castle was restored to Parliamentary hands . Parliamentary commander @-@ in @-@ chief Sir Thomas Fairfax inspected the castle and ordered further repairs and strengthening of the gun platforms . It appears that the height of the gatehouse was also increased at this time , and

the north and south towers were built up . They appear to have been left open at the back (on the landward side) , but this was remedied in 1653 in the course of further repairs , making them suitable for use as troop accommodation .

= = = Raid on the Medway = = =

The castle only saw action once in its history , during the Dutch Raid on the Medway in June 1667 , part of the Second Anglo - Dutch War . The Dutch , under the nominal command of Lieutenant - Admiral Michiel de Ruyter , bombarded and captured the town of Sheerness , sailed up the Thames to Gravesend , then up the Medway to Chatham . They made their way past the chain that was supposed to block the river , sailed past the castle , and towed away HMS Royal Charles and Unity , as well as burning other ships at anchor . The Dutch anchored in the Medway overnight on 12 June , while the Duke of Albemarle took charge of the defences and ordered the hasty construction of an eight - gun battery next to Upnor Castle , using guns taken from Chatham . The castle 's guns , the garrison 's muskets , and the new battery were all used to bombard the Dutch ships when they attempted a second time to sail past Upnor to Chatham . The Dutch were able to burn some more ships in the anchorage , but they were unable to make further progress and had to withdraw . The outcome of the raid has been described as " the worst naval defeat England has ever sustained . "

The castle had acquitted itself well in the eyes of contemporary observers , despite its inability to prevent the raid , and the dedication of its garrison was praised . The pro - government London Gazette reported that " they were so warmly entertained by Major Scot , who commanded there [at Upnor] , and on the other side by Sir Edward Spragg , from the Battery at the Shoare , that after very much Damage received by them in the shattering of their ships , in sinking severall of their Long Boats manned out by them , in the great number of their Men kill 'd , and some Prisoners taken , they were at the last forced to retire . " Military historian Norman Longmate observes tartly , " in presenting damning facts in the most favourable light Charles [II 's] ministers were unsurpassed . " Samuel Pepys , secretary of the Navy Board , got closer to the truth when he noted in his diary that the castle 's garrison were poorly provisioned : " I do not see that Upnor Castle hath received any hurt by them though they played long against it ; and they themselves shot till they had hardly a gun left upon the carriages , so badly provided they were . "

= = = Usage as a magazine and naval facility = = =

Upnor Castle had been neglected previously , but the Dutch attack prompted the government to order that it be maintained " as a fort and place of strength " . In the end , the raid marked the end of the castle 's career as a fortress . New and more powerful forts were built farther down the Medway and on the Isle of Grain with the aim of preventing enemies reaching Chatham , thus making the castle redundant . It was converted into " a Place of Stores and Magazines " in 1668 with a new purpose of supplying munitions to naval warships anchored in the Medway or the Swale . Guns , gun carriages , shot , and gunpowder were stored in great quantities within the main building of the castle , which had to be increased in height and its floors reinforced to accommodate the weight . By 1691 , it was England 's leading magazine , with 164 iron guns , 62 standing carriages , 100 ships ' carriages , 7 @, 125 pieces of iron shot , over 200 muskets of various types , 77 pikes , and 5 @, 206 barrels of powder . This was considerably more than was held at the next largest magazine , the Tower of London .

Upnor Castle ceased to be used as a magazine after 1827 and was converted into an Ordnance Magazine . No gunpowder or explosives were stored there after 1840 , though other magazines continued to be built nearby . It was linked to Chattenden Barracks , originally the School of Military Railways , via a 2 ft 6 in (76 cm) narrow @- gauge line built for steam locomotives . In 1891 , the castle and its associated depot came under the full control of the Admiralty , ending an arrangement in which the War Office had managed the site with the Admiralty providing the funding . It became a Royal Naval Armaments Depot (RNAD) , one of a group of such facilities around the country . The

castle and magazine were used for a time as a proofyard for testing firearms and explosives .

The castle remained in military ownership , but it became more of a museum from the 1920s onwards . During the Second World War , the castle was still in service as part of the Magazine Establishment and was damaged by two enemy bombs which fell in 1941 . The bombing dislodged pieces of plaster in the castle 's south tower and gatehouse , under which were discovered old graffiti , including a drawing of a ship dated to around 1700 .

= = = The castle today = = =

Following the end of the war in 1945 , the Admiralty gave approval for Upnor Castle to be used as a Departmental Museum and to be opened to the public . It subsequently underwent a degree of restoration . The castle was scheduled as an Ancient Monument in January 1960 and is currently managed by English Heritage . It remains part of the Crown Estate .

= = Description = =

Upnor Castle 's buildings were constructed from a combination of Kentish ragstone and ashlar blocks , plus red bricks and timber . Its main building is a two @-@ storeyed rectangular block that measures 41 m (135 ft) by 21 m (69 ft) , aligned in a north @-@ east / south @-@ west direction on the west bank of the Medway . Later known as the Magazine , it has been changed considerably since its original construction . It would have included limited barrack accommodation , possibly in a small second storey placed behind gun platforms on the roof . After the building was converted into a magazine in 1668 many changes were made which have obscured the earlier design . The second storey appears to have been extended across the full length of the building , covering over the earlier rooftop gun platforms . This gave more room for storage in the interior . The ground floor was divided into three compartments with a woodblock floor and copper @-@ sheeted doors to reduce the risk of sparks . Further stores were housed on the first floor , with a windlass to raise stores from the waterside .

A circular staircase within the building gives access to the castle 's main gun platform or water bastion , a low triangular structure projecting into the river . The castle 's main armament was mounted here in the open air ; this is now represented by six mid @-@ 19th century guns that are still on their original carriages . There are nine embrasures in the bastion , six facing downstream and three upstream , with a rounded parapet designed to deflect shot . The water bastion was additionally protected by a wooden palisade that follows its triangular course a few metres further out in the river . The present palisade is a modern recreation of the original structure .

A pair of towers stand on the river 's edge a short distance on either side from the main building . They were originally two @-@ storeyed open @-@ backed structures with gun platforms situated on their first floors , providing flanking fire down the line of the ditch around the castle 's perimeter . They were later adapted for use as accommodation , with their backs closed with bricks and the towers increased in height to provide a third storey . Traces of the gun embrasures can still be seen at the point where the original roofline was . The South Tower was said to have been for the use of the castle 's governor , though their lack of comfort meant that successive governors declined to live there . The two towers are linked to the main building by a crenallated curtain wall where additional cannon were emplaced in two embrasures on the north parapet and one on the south .

The castle 's principal buildings are situated on the east side of a rectangular courtyard within which stand two large Turkey oaks , said to have been grown from acorns brought from Crimea after the Crimean War . A stone curtain wall topped with brick surrounds the courtyard , standing about 1 m (3 @. @ 3 ft) thick and 4 m (13 ft) high . The courtyard is entered on the north @-@ western side through a four @-@ storeyed gatehouse with gun embasures for additional defensive strength . It was substantially rebuilt in the 1650s after being badly damaged in a 1653 fire , traces of which can still be seen in the form of scorched stones on the first floor walls . A central gateway with a round arch leads into a passage that gives access to the courtyard . Above the gateway is a late 18th century clock that was inserted into the existing structure . A wooden bellcote was added in the early

19th century and a modern flagpole surmounts the building .

The curtain wall is surrounded by a dry ditch which was originally nearly 10 m (33 ft) wide by 5 m (18 ft) deep , though it has since been partially infilled . Visitors to the castle crossed a drawbridge , which is no longer extant , to reach the gatehouse . A secondary entrance to the castle is provided by a sally port in the north wall . On the inside of the curtain wall the brick foundations of buildings can still be seen . These were originally lean to structures , constructed in the 17th century to provide storage facilities for the garrison .

A short distance to the south west of the castle is a barracks block and associated storage buildings , constructed soon after 1718 . Built to replace the original barrack accommodation within the castle when it was redeveloped to convert it into a magazine , it has changed little externally in the last 300 years . It is a rare surviving example of an 18th century building of this type and was one of the first distinct barracks to be built in England .

Depot buildings formerly associated with the castle still survive in the area immediately to the north east and remain in Ministry of Defence hands . They were constructed on top of earlier gun emplacements , of which earthwork traces can still be seen in the form of a broad bank running north east from the castle towards the depot .