

Pendennis Castle

Pendennis Castle crowns a headland a mile east of Falmouth. The name suggests a Dark Age hillfort but any remains are buried beneath the later rampart. What now stands is an Elizabethan artillery fortress surrounding one of Henry VIII's coastal forts. Erected in 1540-45, when the Reformation had made England a target for invasion, the castle protected the entrance to Carrick Roads, the large inlet of the sea which could have offered a sheltered landing place to the fleet of the Catholic powers. St. Mawes Castle was placed on the opposite shore and the guns of the two forts commanded the mile-long sheet of water between them.

Pendennis is unusual among the Henrician coastal forts in having such an elevated position. On the rocks below is a semi-circular blockhouse which would have been of value in repelling ships invisible from the castle. As originally conceived Pendennis was one of the smaller coastal forts, just a squat round tower with gun ports at all three levels. The walls were thick enough to withstand the artillery of that time and the merlons of the parapet are rounded off to deflect any well-sized cannon balls.

The porticullis remains in position and the slots for drawbridge chains can still be seen. Over the entrance is a handsome panel bearing the royal arms. The low chemise wall with gun emplacements surrounding the tower must also have been an afterthought, as it blocks the gun ports on the ground floor of the tower. Henry's castles were purely defensive units, but the quality of masonry here is high and there was clearly a lot of pride in the workmanship.

A Classical entrance commemorates the completion of the defenses in 1611. The enlarged castle was garrisoned as part of the coastal defense system until the Second World War.