

An aerial photograph of Pendennis Headland in Falmouth, Cornwall. The headland is a green, grassy peninsula with a large stone fortification complex at its tip. A winding road leads up the headland, and a parking area is visible near the shore. The harbor is filled with blue water, and several ships are docked at the piers. In the background, the surrounding landscape of Falmouth is visible, including fields and buildings.

**Fortress Falmouth**

# Pendennis Headland Circular Walks

**Explore 450 Years of Fortifications**

## INTRODUCTION

The defences of Pendennis Headland are a remarkable illustration of Britain's military history over the last 450 years. Each period of foreign threat is marked by improvements to the fortifications.

Further back in time, there was almost certainly an Iron Age promontory fort. The name Pendennis is the only evidence; it comes from the Cornish *pen dynas*, meaning 'headland fort'.

From Tudor times, the Fal Estuary, with its sheltered anchorage at the western end of the English Channel, was of strategic importance to the defence of Britain.

Pendennis and St. Mawes Castles were completed in 1545, as part of Henry VIII's chain of castles along England's south coast. Fifty years later, during Elizabeth I's reign, the Spanish again threatened invasion, and Sir Walter Raleigh incorporated Pendennis Castle into a massive fortress with high ramparts and a dry moat.

Ironically, it was during the English Civil War that Pendennis Castle first came under fire. In 1646, the Royalists held the Headland against a Parliamentary siege. After five desperate months the starving Royalists were forced to surrender, but were allowed to march out *'drums beating, colours flying, trumpets sounding'*.



During the late 19th/early 20th centuries England's south coast was refortified and the range, speed and accuracy of fire power increased. There were many improvements at Pendennis Headland, and new gun batteries were established at St. Mawes and St. Anthony Head. These defences were considerably strengthened in both world wars, when Falmouth Bay was an assembly area for the Atlantic convoys.

After coastal artillery was declared obsolete in 1956, the guns were taken for scrap, and the Ministry of Works cleared much of the 20th century defences. It is only now that these are appreciated as part of the extraordinary story of the defence of our island nation.



The Fal Estuary, c1580 from Lord Burghley's map © The British Library

**This leaflet features a Pendennis Fortifications Trail, which explores the best sites outside the Castle ramparts. It is well worth visiting Pendennis Castle before commencing the Trail.**



## PENDENNIS HEADLAND'S FORTIFICATIONS IN 1646 AND TODAY

Although Pendennis Castle and Little Dennis Blockhouse have survived in remarkably good condition, very little remains of their outer defence works. Compare the illustration with the map, which shows the surviving fortifications today. The artist's impression portrays Pendennis during the Civil War siege of 1646, when the defences against landward attack were at their strongest.



### KEY

- mid 16th century (Henry VIII)
- late 16th century (Elizabeth I)
- 17th century
- 18th - 19th centuries
- 20th century





## WOODLAND WALK

A half-hour stroll along Hunters' Path, amongst woodland planted in the 19th century.

**1** The walk starts near a layby on the western side of Pendennis Headland (see map on right). Take the crushed stone path, which becomes the 19th century Hunters' Path at the edge of the woodland. Notice that through the undergrowth the Hunters' Path is raised on a wide embankment on either side. Both the woodland and the path date from c1863, when the railway came to Falmouth. They were amongst many civic improvements to the resort to attract wealthy tourists. Castle Drive and Falmouth Hotel were both completed in 1865; and visitors began coming to Falmouth to over-winter in Cornwall's mild climate.

Hunters' Path would have been a wide gravel path for gentlemen and their ladies to enjoy the fine views and the new plantings of Monterey Pine and Evergreen Oak.

**2** This is one of many quarries around the headland from where the local Devonian slate-stone was obtained for the construction of the Elizabethan fortress.

**3** Hunters' Path at this point crosses on a wide embankment over the middle of a deep quarry, which runs from Castle Drive up the hillside. Sir Walter Raleigh's engineer almost certainly intended this quarry to have a dual purpose as an outer defence work against infantry attack of the fortress.

**4** At the bottom of Hunters' Path, the small 'island' in the path is reputed to be a smuggler's grave, who was shot by the Coastguard in the 18th century.



**5** A short detour leads to a shaded Grotto, where the 19th century civic improvements provided a romantically sited seat in a rock-cut recess. This woodland dell is the bottom of the quarry seen at 3, and is bright with bluebells in May.



**6** The lay-by offers fine views across Falmouth Bay, where there are usually ships at anchor awaiting bunkering (ie. loading with fuel, from Falmouth harbour). On the slope below, a hospital for the garrison was in use into the 19th century, but nothing of it survives.



P

1

1

P

6

2

2

3

5

3

4

5

4

6

One Gun  
Battery

7

Half Moon  
Battery

Castle Drive

Castle Drive

P31



## AROUND THE FORTRESS

This is a popular half-hour walk which can be enjoyed at any time. It is the best way of appreciating the remarkably well-preserved Elizabethan fortress, which encloses Henry VIII's castle.

**1** Commence the walk outside the gatehouse to Pendennis Castle (See map on left). The moat has always been dry, and was designed to make scaling of the ramparts and mining operations more difficult. Additional defence was provided by a high palisade of close-set pointed wooden stakes which ran the full length of the centre of the moat. Stakes also projected horizontally from the top of the ramparts.

**2** The north-west front of the fortress is its strongest point as this was the principal line of defence against landward attack along the ridge. Between the 2 bastions the moat was made especially wide, and an infantry attack would have faced close defensive fire from 3 sides.

**3** The raised bank going down the slope on the seaward side of the path is an Elizabethan outer defence work to prevent a landward attack on the sea batteries around the flank of the headland. Although it is now very eroded, it is unusual for such vulnerable outer defence features to survive.

**4** Looking up at the top of the ramparts, a battery of 9 cannon is just visible, which would have defended the entrance to Carrick Roads.



**5** Just before the end of the moat, look out for a cast-iron socket, flush with the ground along the counterscarp path. This was for an alignment post for a late 19th century minefield laid on the seabed between Pendennis and St. Mawes Castles. Each alignment post would have had its matching pair on the St. Mawes side. These early mines depended on observers accurately sighting a target approaching a mine, which they would then detonate. Such minefields were one of the first uses of electricity.



**6** The ramparts and moat continued around the entire fortress, but this section was completely buried by infill for the construction of One Gun Battery in 1894. This had a 6-inch gun in a deep pit for a 'disappearing carriage', a device to enable the gun to be loaded in safety before being raised for firing.



**7** The track gently curving up to the base of the ramparts linked Half Moon Battery and the Castle before the excavation of a more direct tunnel in the late 19th century. The track led to an Elizabethan Sallyport, which was a small drawbridge providing a secondary access for the Castle. It too was destroyed during the construction of One Gun Battery.

*For the remainder of the walk see sections 11 to 7 on the Pendennis Fortifications Trail overleaf.*

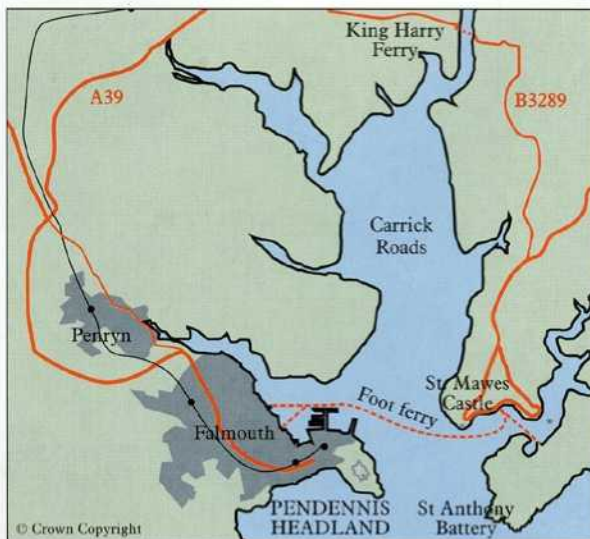
## GETTING THERE

**By train** Falmouth Docks station is only 500 metres from the start of the Pendennis Fortifications Trail (see overleaf). Enquiries 08457 48 49 50 (low charge 24 hours).

**By bus** First  
Tel. 01209 719988.  
Truronian Tel. 01872 273453.

**By ferry** Foot passengers -  
St. Mawes Ferry Co. from  
St. Mawes to Prince of Wales Pier,  
Falmouth. No Sunday  
service in winter.  
Tel. 01326 313201.

**By car** Follow the tourist signs  
on the A39.



## OPENING TIMES

### Pendennis Castle

1 April - 31 October,  
daily 10 am - 6 pm  
(closes 5 pm in October).  
1 November - 31 March, daily  
10 am - 4 pm (closed 24-26  
December & 1 January).  
Tel. 01326 316594  
(Café for Castle visitors  
1 April - 30 September, daily  
10.30 am - 5.30 pm).

**Ships and Castles Leisure Pool**  
(Restaurant/café open daily).  
Tel. 01326 212129.

## OTHER FAL FORTIFICATIONS TO VISIT

### St. Mawes Castle

1 April - 31 October, daily 10 am -  
6 pm (closes at 5 pm in October).  
1 November - 31 March,  
Wednesday to Sunday 10 am -  
4 pm (closed 24 - 26 December,  
1 January & 1 - 2 pm winter).  
Tel. 01326 270526.

### St. Anthony Battery

A wonderful walk around the  
dry moat of an 1897 fort, with a  
Battery Observation Post en  
route. Free access to this  
National Trust site at any time.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

### Falmouth Tourist Information

Centre 28 Killigrew Street,  
Falmouth, Cornwall TR11 3PN  
Tel. 01326 312300.

**Roseland Visitor Centre**, The  
Square, St. Mawes, Cornwall  
TR2 5AG  
Tel. 01326 270440.

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