

UPNOR CASTLE

KENT

Upnor Castle is a well preserved example of an Elizabethan fort, built to protect Queen Elizabeth's warships anchoring in the Medway. It offers a good introduction to naval history and to the sitting and engineering methods of coastal fortifications.

Historical Description

Upnor is a Tudor fort built on the banks of the Medway in the early years of Elizabeth I's reign. Throughout its history it has had close ties with the Navy. It was built for the purpose of protecting Queen Elizabeth's warships anchoring in the Medway alongside the growing dockyard at Chatham.

The original fort, begun in 1559, was not so extensive as the present one. It consisted of an angled water bastion (a projection in front of the fort from which cannon could defend the river) and a rectangular building on the river bank. In 1599, ten years or so after the defeat of the Armada it was enlarged and a moat and a gatehouse added on the landward side. Stone from the demolition of Rochester Castle up-river was used in its construction.

It was not until Upnor's last days as a fort that it was called upon to defend the fleet. In 1667 there was an audacious raid by the Dutch, first up the Thames where they reached as far as Gravesend, and then up the Medway to strike at Chatham. They made light of the chain that blocked the river and the gun batteries that were hastily put up to impede their progress. At Chatham they captured the Royal Charles and set fire to a number of other ships at anchor. The following day when they sailed back down the Medway, they came under heavy artillery and musketry fire from Upnor. Despite heroic efforts by the garrison the Dutch, though damaged, were not sunk. The Dutch raid was a humiliating one and though Upnor emerged from it with some credit, there was general alarm at the inadequacy of the coastal defences.

Over the next 15 years enormous sums of money were spent improving fortifications around the coast. On the Medway new gun batteries were placed further down river from Upnor and these reduced the castle's importance. Upnor was then converted into a magazine

and munitions depot. For many years it supplied gunpowder and stores to the ships anchored in the Medway. Evidence of its use both as a fort and a magazine can be seen today.

Learning Opportunities

Upnor, with its close naval associations, offers a variation on the castle theme. It is an interesting building with a good atmosphere and is filled with barrels to give the impression of a magazine.

Upnor would be a useful site to show the style and engineering methods of an Elizabethan fort, and would fit well with Key Stage 2 or Key Stage 3 **History** Study Units on the Tudors or the Armada. It would be a good site for those studying naval history in general or a Key Stage 2 study on Ships and Seafarers, when it could perhaps be combined with a trip to Chatham Dockyard.

There is plenty of documentary evidence for the Dutch raid up the Medway in 1667 and as **preparation** for a visit it would be useful to discuss this and to assess the positioning and effectiveness of the coastal fortifications. A study could be made of the defences linked with this particular event, using the documentary evidence. **On site**, pupils could bring alive many details of the raid through role play, and through observation and recording details of the building. It is possible to walk out on to the water bastion to see the defended area and the river. As **follow up** to this aspect of the visit, Upnor's position on the Medway could be studied from maps and then compared with other defensive sites around the coast and on the Thames. As an English activity pupils could write up the events of the raid in various forms. These could include newspaper reports from the point of view of the Dutch and also the English, or as an eye witness writing letters, diaries or even a ship's log.

A visit would also fit in with more cross curricular topics on rivers and water transport, leading to more investigative work in **Geography** and **Technology**. There are ideas for activities in **Art** and **Mathematics** in the Teacher's Handbook.

Location

On the west bank of the River Medway, close to junction of A2 and A228. Grid Ref: TQ 758706. OS Map 178.

How to get there

Road: Access by minor road off the A228. In Upnor, turn towards the river at the pub.

Train: Strood Station on the Charing Cross line is 1 ½ miles to the SW. Enquiries, tel: 08457 484950

Bus: Arriva Kent & East Sussex service 197 from Chatham and 191/4 Chatham – Hoo, alight Wainscott 1 mile away. Enquiries, tel 01622 697000.

Facilities

Exhibition: Audio visual display on Dutch raid of 1667.

Access for disabled visitors: regrettably limited to the grounds.

Parking: No on-site parking but there is a public car-park 100 yds from the site.

Shop: The bookstall sells guidebooks, postcards and souvenirs.

Toilets: on site.

Free Educational Visits

Please remember you are responsible for carrying out your own risk assessment.

Upnor Castle is now managed on behalf of English Heritage by Medway Council. Education visits are free of charge and should be booked at least 14 days in advance.

For detailed information on current opening hours, please contact the regional office or visit

www.English-Heritage.org.uk

Contacts

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Nearby and Related Sites

Tilbury Fort. First established in the time of Henry VIII to guard the Thames. Enlarged in the 17th century.

Deal Castle. One of the largest and most complete of the coastal forts built by Henry VIII. Kent is rich in castles and forts of all periods, these include **Reculver** and **Richborough** which are Roman forts, **Rochester Castle**, **Eynsford Castle**, **Dover Castle** and **Walmer Castle**.

There is also a nineteenth century **Martello Tower** at Dymchurch. All English Heritage.

A Guide to Resources

Saunders, A.D. Upnor Castle, Site handbook. English Heritage, 1985

Lloyd C, Blanchard H, Edwards L, Upnor Castle A Handbook for Teachers, English Heritage, 1991, ISBN 1-85074-287-1.

Lockey M, Walmsley D, Art and the Historic Environment, English Heritage, 1999, ISBN 1-85074-651-6

Collins F, Hollinshead L, English and the Historic Environment, English Heritage, 2000, ISBN 1-85074-330-4

Rogers P.G The Dutch in the Medway, Oxford 1970
Latham R. The illustrated Pepys, Bell and Hyman, 1978, Selections from Pepys' diaries which contain references to the Dutch raid.

Mc Dougall P. The Chatham Dockyard Story, Rochester Press, 1981

Crocker, G. The Gunpowder Industry, Shire Album 160, Shire Publications, 1986

Wilkinson-Latham R.J. Discovering Artillery, Shire Publications, (No 123)

All English Heritage resources are available from English Heritage c/o Gillards, Trident Works, Temple Cloud, Bristol, BS39 5AZ.

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