

TILBURY FORT

Tilbury Fort is of special interest to the Enrolled Pensioners as many Enrolled Pensioners embarked from Tilbury on at least 20 ships and at least a further six ships left from Gravesend, just a ferry ride across the river. (There has been a ferry across the Thames in the parishes of East and West Tilbury since at least Roman Times.) Therefore, many Pensioners would have stayed at the Fort for at least one or two nights before embarking on their ship to sail to the Swan River Colony.

The artillery fort at Tilbury on the Thames estuary protected London's seaward approach from the 16th century through to World War II. It has been termed the "Key to London"

Henry VIII built the first fort here, and Queen Elizabeth famously rallied her army nearby to face the threat of the Armada with her famous speech, "I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomache of a king and a king of England too."

After the English Civil war King Charles II was exiled in Holland where he was influenced by European advances in military architecture. Following the disastrous 1667 Dutch attack on the English fleet moored on the nearby Medway - Charles II set in motion the re-fortification of the site by employing Dutchman Sir Bernard De Gomme who had been engineer in the Royalist army during the civil war and who followed Charles into exile.

The area around Tilbury is marshland so for protection they built Double Moats. The fort mounted powerful artillery to command the river, as well as landward defences. Later, two

magazines were constructed to store vast quantities of gunpowder.



Aerial View

After the Battle of Culloden in 1746, over 3 000 prisoners were shipped, on seven ships in bad repair, to England for trial. Three hundred of these prisoners were imprisoned in the redundant gunpowder magazine building in the south-east bastion of Tilbury Fort. There were only twenty prisoners selected for trial by lots.

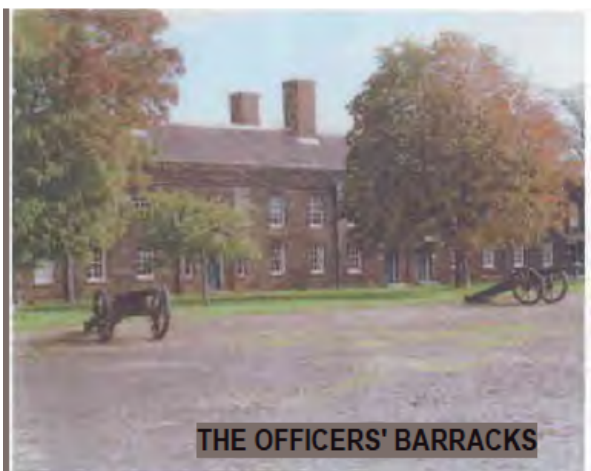


The Water Gate

Perhaps because of its strength, Tilbury Fort has never been involved in the kind of action for which it was designed. The worst bloodshed within the fort occurred in 1776, when a fight following a Kent-Essex cricket match left a cricketer and the fort's sergeant dead.

During the period when the EPG were embarking from the fort, Tilbury was undergoing refurbishment with new Rifled Muzzle-Loading (RML) Cannon, new magazines and wall reinforcements. The guns were mostly 9 inch calibre but there was one 11 inch, which weighed 25 tons.

Simultaneously **new forts were** constructed down stream so Tilbury became the second line of defence.



In 1857 an Army Sanitary Commission was established to review sanitation in England's forts. It would appear to have been needed as the description of Tilbury at that time was: Sanitation was in the form of a communal toilet — called the bog house — and a cold wash under the pump on the parade ground. Barrack rooms could be quite unpleasant places with an atmosphere thick with the smell of food, pipe and coal smoke, candle wax, damp clothes, body odour, dirty feet and the wooden tub that served as the night urinal. The commission led to gradual improvement: married quarters, proper toilets, running water and washrooms

together with recreation and reading rooms.

Tilbury Fort is now in the care of English Heritage and is open to the public.

There are several excellent web sites on Tilbury Fort, including the English Heritage site. Another good site for photos is:

<http://iohnsmilitaryhistory.com/tilbury1.html>

Thanks to Sue Baddeley and Ron Sutton for their resources.

References:

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Editor