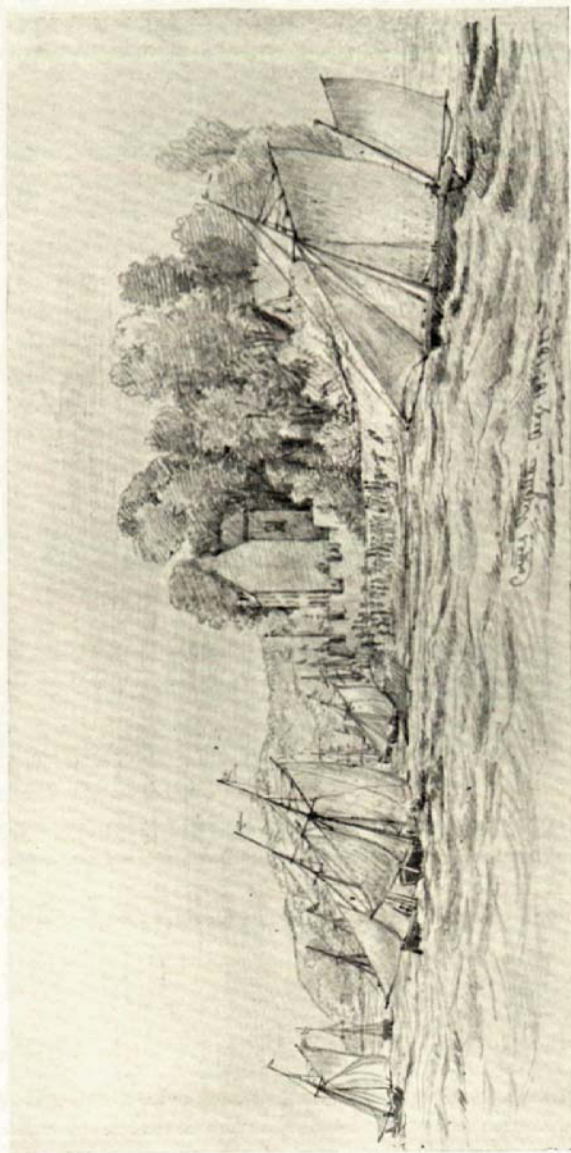




COWES CASTLE.
THE REGATTA, 1825.
From a sketch by Miss Emma Bacon (afterwards Mrs. Thoyts, of Sulhamstead).

COWES CASTLE.

BY SIR WILLIAM PORTAL, BART., F.S.A.

Among such qualities as tended, in some measure, to redeem the sinister character of Henry VIII., was a profound belief in the greatness and in the destinies of his country, coupled with a resolve to promote them. He fully recognised the importance of rendering the shores of England more secure against attack, a consideration which had long received insufficient attention, and it was with this view that he erected what may be termed a series of forts or castles along the coast.

At one of them we have met to-day ; with several of the others we, in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, are especially familiar.

We owe to Henry VIII. the Castles of Southsea, Netley, Calshot, and Hurst, on the Hampshire shores, and those of Sandown, East and West Cowes, and Yarmouth in the Isle of Wight. Of these Castles those of Sandown and East Cowes no longer exist. They all present for the most part (though the Castle at Yarmouth and Hurst are more ambitious in character), the same features ; a semi-circular battery, protecting a small stone fort or castle in its rear.

Upon this occasion we are concerned with what was originally termed West Cowes Castle, in distinction to that formerly existing on the opposite side of the Medina River at, what is still known as, "Old Castle Point."

Both were erected in about the year 1539. Of these two Castles, Camden recites some Latin verses made by Leland, which are thus translated by Bishop Gibson¹ :—

" The two great Cows that in loud thunder roar,
This on the Eastern, that on the Western shore ;
Where Newport enters stately Wight."

¹ Bishop of Lincoln 1715—1723, and of London 1723—1748.

Leland in his Itinerary (*circa* 1540) thus describes them :—

"Ther be 2 new castelles sette up and furnished at the mouth of Newporte; that is the only haven in Wight to be spoken of. That that is sette up on the Este syde of the haven is callid the Est Cow, and that is sette up on the Weste syde is callid the West Cow, and is the bigger castelle of the 2. The trajectus betwixt these 2 castelles is a good myle."

This Castle originally consisted of a "Barbican" and a "Main tower," with east and west "Wings."

In the first year of the reign of King Edward VI. an inventory was taken, under Letters Patent, dated at Westminster on September 14th, of the "Ordenaunce, Munycion and other Goods" belonging to King Henry VIII. at certain strongholds in the Isle of Wight. The following is the return made at :—

"THE CASTELL AT THE WESTE COWE."

Ordenaunce, artillery and other munycions of Warre remainyng in the said Castell in the cherge or custody of Robert Raymonde captayne.

THE BARBYCAN.

Curtoll cannon of brasse furnished	.. ..	Oone
Bastard culveryne of brasse furnished	.. ..	Oone
Porte peices of yrone furnished with iiij chambers	..	ij
Three quarter slinges with ij chambers	.. ..	Oone
Porte peices not hable to serve	.. ..	Oone
Cannon shotte of yrone	.. ..	xvij
Bastard culveryn shotte of yrone	.. ..	xiiij
Bastard culveryn shotte of leade	.. ..	lvj
Shotte for port peices of stone	.. ..	xxx
Slinge shotte of irone	.. ..	xxxij

THE WEST WINGE.

Doble bases with ij chambers not hable to serve	..	Oone
Single bases with iiij chambers not hable to serve	..	ij

THE EASTE WINGE.

Doble bases with iiij chambers not hable to serve	..	ij
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THE MAYNE TOWRE.

Doble bases with ij chambers furnished		Oone
Three quarter slinges with ij chambers a peice whereof		
oone is not hable to serve	.. ..	iiij
Single bases with viij chambers not hable to serve	..	iiij

Three quarter sling shott of leade	..	..	..	..	..	cxlvj
Shotte for doble bases	..	..	..	..	..	lxiiiij
Serpentyne powder	..	..	..	..	..	j doble bar.
						ij firke
Hagbutts not hable to serve	..	..	..	..	..	x
Corne powder	..	..	..	..	..	iiiij lb.
Bowes	..	..	..	..	..	xix
Chests of arrowes	..	..	..	..	..	xxxij
Pickes	..	..	..	..	..	xxij
Billes	..	..	..	..	..	xx."

In the reign of Queen Elizabeth the annual expenses of the Castle amounted to £39 10s. 10d., and it had a Captain at a shilling a day, a Porter at eightpence, and three gunners at sixpence a day each.

Sir William D'Avenant [1606—1668] the distinguished Dramatist and Poet Laureate was brought to Cowes Castle as a prisoner in 1650. While a refugee in France, during the troubles between the King and the Parliament, Sir William D'Avenant was dispatched by Queen Henrietta Maria on a special mission to Virginia, but was captured off the English coast by a Parliament ship and confined in Cowes Castle. During his confinement he wrote half the third book of his poem upon "Gondibert," but stopped with a postscript to the reader, dated Cowes Castle, 22nd October, 1650, in which occur the words :—

"T'is high time to strike sail and cast anchor (though I have run but half my course). When at the helme I am threatened with Death, who, though he can visit us but once, seems troublesome ; and even in the innocent may beget such a gravity as diverts the musick of verse."

Sir William D'Avenant was removed from Cowes Castle to the Tower of London, where he remained for about two years and was subsequently set at liberty.

"The Castle at present (says Grose in 1774) consists of a small stone house, having on its north front a semi-circular battery, built, likewise, with stone, and pierced for eight guns. It is strongly fenced with piles and planks against the sea, from which it would, otherwise, be in some danger, as it makes frequent encroachments. This fort is commanded, under the Governor of the Island, by a Captain, whose

pay is ten shillings per diem ; that post is at present filled by Sir John Milles, late Lieutenant-Governor of Jersey."

A small establishment was maintained here during our wars with France, and the battery was armed with eleven guns, nine-pounders. "A modern writer," says Albin in 1795, "has made this humorous observation on this Castle, which may not improperly be cited in this place ; he says, 'the mighty Castle afforded some remarks on

Gunnery, who ne'er mount a wall ;
And guns that never fire at all.' "

Sir Henry Englefield (Hist : Isle of Wight) thus describes the Castle in 1816 :—

"It now consists of a semi-circular platform towards the sea, on which are mounted twelve heavy guns. A range of buildings forms the diameter to the semi-circle, and in it are lodgings for the Governor, a gunner, and a magazine. The exterior part of the central building forms a part of a circle and is the remainder of an original round tower, which was once a storey higher than it now is and had embrasures on its summit for cannon. The whole is of very good masonry. The hill rises quick behind it, and on a sort of turf esplanade adjoining to the Castle are twelve very fine old elms, which, with the Castle, form a pleasing picture from every side."

Of the "twelve very fine old elms" above mentioned as existing in 1816, six still remain, though they have since been pollarded.

The Castle is built of Island stone. The quarries of the Isle of Wight had for centuries acquired more than a local reputation. At Binstead, after the Conquest, King William granted quarrying rights to Walkelin, who was then building his Cathedral Church at Winchester, a licence confirmed by William Rufus and by his brother Henry. Besides its use in Quarr Abbey, and in many of the older churches of the Island, Binstead stone was employed at Beaulieu, Netley, and Titchfield, in the older work at Southampton, and as far north in Hampshire as Burghclere, near Newbury, and Popham, near Basingstoke. In the reign of Henry III. Binstead stone was used for the repairs and rebuilding of Winchester Castle.

Of this stone West Cowes Castle was built, and has stood the test of time. Mr. Colenutt remarks: "The joints of the masonry are as fine and the angles of the stonework are as sharp as if built but a few years ago, instead of having stood for four centuries."

Although subsequently altered internally to meet residential requirements, the outer walls of the central portion of the Castle as we see it to-day remain as originally erected.

THE ROYAL YACHT SQUADRON.

For the past sixty years Cowes Castle has been the Club House of the premier Yacht Club, the "Royal Yacht Squadron," and this association seems to render some allusion to yachting, as a form of recreation, not altogether inappropriate upon this occasion.

All those to whom this subject is of interest must acknowledge their indebtedness to Mr. Chatterton for his work entitled "Fore and Aft," to the late Mr. Montagu Guest and Mr. Boulton for their "History of the Royal Yacht Squadron," from which, from Pepys' Diary, and from the Minutes of the R.Y.S., the greater portion of the following account is derived.

The advantages of a small sailing vessel devoted to the purposes of pleasures were not recognised until the reign of King Charles II. That monarch, indeed, has every claim to be considered the father of English yachting. It appears that, during his sojourn in the Channel Islands, in 1646, when he was sixteen years of age, he was accustomed to amuse himself by sailing a small boat about the coast of those islands. When he came to his own again in 1660, it occurred to the management of the Dutch East India Company to present His Majesty with a small sailing vessel, the rig of which we can only guess at, but which was certainly decked, and was of about one hundred tons burthen. This vessel was called the *Mary*, and named after Charles' sister, the Princess Royal, widow of William of Nassau, Prince of Orange.

The gift was much appreciated by the King, as is plain from the interest he took in her performance, and her appellation of "Yacht," which was on everyone's lips in 1661, first came into general use in England in that year.

The word, we are told, is derived from the Dutch "yaghten," or "jagen," "to hunt," and was first used as an adjective in Holland in the sense of "swift," or "fast." "Yacht schip" was a "swift vessel," like "flyboat," a term much used in this country until quite modern times. An earlier mention of the term "yacht" is recorded, but it was King Charles' fondness for his new boat, which, after 1660, first brought the word into common use.

In Johnson's Dictionary a yacht is described as

"A small ship for carrying passengers. 'The evening before, we met, off the Sound, Lord Sandwich in the *Augusta* yacht (Cook's Voyage).'"

There are several references to a second Dutch yacht which was called the *Bezan*. It was, however, natural that King Charles should wish for a yacht of English construction, and in 1661 we find that he was possessed of a boat named the *Jenny*, which was built for him by Commissioner Peter Pett.

"So to the Globe to dinner, and then with Commissioner Pett to his lodgings there [Deptford] which he hath for the present, while he is building the King's yacht, which will be a pretty thing and much beyond the Dutchman's."—[Pepys, 13th January, 1661.]

The anticipations of Pepys with regard to the *Jenny* were realized. On May 21st of the same year he says:—

"And so took barge again and were overtaken by the King in his barge, he having been down the river with his yacht this day for pleasure to try it; and, as I hear, Commissioner Pett's do prove better than the Dutch one and that that his brother built."

This latter yacht would have been the *Anne*, built by Christopher Pett for the King's brother, the Duke of York, and named, we may suppose, after his wife Anne Hyde, daughter of Chancellor Hyde, afterwards Earl of Clarendon.

In September, 1661, Pepys records that he took Mrs. Pepys and a party of friends down the river :—

“ And showed them the King's and Duke's yachts, and we had great pleasure in seeing all four yachts, viz., these two, and the two Dutch ones.”

These four yachts were the *Jenny*, the *Anne*, and “ the two Dutch ones ” the *Mary* and the *Bezan*.

The year 1662 is memorable in the annals of yachting as that of the first recorded race. The “ *Encyclopædia Britannica* ” informs us that “ the King raced the Duke in a small Dutch boat from Greenwich to Gravesend and back for £100 and beat her.”

It was not long before King Charles seems to have contemplated the building of a new yacht to supplement the *Mary* and the *Jenny*. In May, 1663 :—

“ Meeting the King we followed him into the Park, where Mr. Coventry and he talked of building a new yacht, which the King is resolved to have built out of his own privy purse, he having some contrivance of his own.”—[Pepys.]

The interest in yachts and yachting seems to have died out as suddenly as it had arisen; and the royal yachts appear to have been handed over to the Admiralty, and used as official dispatch boats.

At any rate the King's yacht, the *Bezan*, was much used by Pepys and his companions when they were communicating with the Fleet from London to Deptford.

“ So after supper Captain Cocke and I and Temple on board the *Bezan*, and then to cards for a while and so to sleep. But Lord ! the mirth that it caused me to be waked in the night by their snoaring about me ; I did laugh till I was ready to burst, and waked one of the two companions of Temple, who could not a good while tell where he was that he heard one laugh so, till he recollected himself, and I told him what it was at, and so to sleep again, they still snoaring.”—[Pepys, October, 1665.]

The last mention of the *Bezan* in Pepys' incomparable Diary is in connection with circumstances very different from those of recreation.

The year 1666 is rendered memorable by the Great Fire of London, and Pepys relates how he first beheld it :—

“ 2nd September (Lord's day), Some of our mayds sitting up late last night to get things ready against our feast to-day, Jane called us up about three in the morning, to tell us of a great fire they saw in the City, so I rose and slipped on my nightgowne and went to her window.”

During all that day and the ensuing night, and for three days and nights subsequently, the fire raged with fury, and all those who lived in London were occupied in saving their goods and, indeed, their lives, from burning or threatened houses. On September 3rd, says Pepys :—

“ About four o'clock in the morning my Lady, Batten sent me a cart to carry away all my money and plate and best things to Sir W. Rider's at Bednall Greene. Which I did, riding myself in my nightgowne in the cart, and Lord ! to see how the streets and the highways were crowded with people running and riding and getting of carts at any rate [cost] to fetch away things.”

As an official of the Admiralty, Pepys then resided at the “ Navy Office,” in the vicinity of the Tower, and, later in the same day, he and his wife and servants took his furniture and other goods over Tower Hill, and

“ downe to the lighter which lay at the next quay above the Tower Docks.”

On the following day the lighter was moved down to Deptford, where, on the 6th September, these goods were safely landed “ at Sir G. Cartaret's.”

By September 12th all danger was at an end, and Pepys took steps for bringing his goods back to his house.

“ After dinner I took him [Balty] down with me to Deptford, and there by the *Besan* loaded half my goods and sent them away. On September 13th to Sir G. Cartaret's to work, and there did to my content slip off into the *Besan* all the rest of my goods, saving my pictures and fine things that I will bring home in wherry's when my house is fit to receive them ; and so home and unload them by carts and hands before night, to my exceeding satisfaction.”

It was, indeed, long before the taste for yachting revived. When Henry Fielding, the great novelist, passed down the Thames on his last sad voyage to Lisbon, where he died in 1754, he recorded some interesting remarks which refer to this subject. He says :—

“ And here I cannot pass by another observation on the deplorable want of taste in our enjoyments which we show by almost totally neglecting the pursuit of, what seems to me, the highest degree of amusement. This is the sailing ourselves in little vessels of our own, contrived only for our ease and accommodation.”

The third Duke of Richmond must certainly be reckoned as one of the pioneers of yachting. We read in a newspaper of July 5th, 1783 :—

“ Yesterday sennight the Duke of Richmond set sail in his new yacht for France.”

The earliest Yacht Club to be instituted in the United Kingdom was the “Cork Water Club,” in 1720, subsequently known as the “Royal Cork Yacht Club,” and nearly a century elapsed before the next Yacht Club, now known as the “Royal Yacht Squadron,” was established.

On the 1st of June, 1815, the year of Waterloo, a body of gentlemen met in London at the “Thatched House Tavern,” in St. James’ Street, under the presidency of Lord Grantham, and decided to form a club which should consist only of men who were interested in the sailing of yachts at sea.

These gentlemen nominated themselves, with others, to the number of forty-two, to form a list which should constitute the original members of the club, decided as to the amount of the subscription, and drew up a few simple rules to govern their Society in the future. The first of these enacted “that the Club be called ‘the Yacht Club.’” They contemplated, apparently, little more than a slight bond of union between the men who met with their yachts at Cowes during the summer.

There were to be two annual meetings, the one in the spring at the “Thatched House,” and the other at a dinner later in the year at “the hotel at East Cowes.”

Upon the accession to the throne of the Prince Regent in 1820, His Majesty, upon the petition of the Club, graciously consented to give it a Royal title, and it thus became known as the "Royal Yacht Club," being the first Yacht Club in the country to enjoy that distinction.

By 1824 the Club began to feel the want of a club house, and in 1825 acquired the lease of a house on the parade, the present Gloucester Hotel, where, accordingly, the Royal Yacht Club was first provided with a habitation. This club house is thus described by Adams (Hist : Isle of Wight) :—

"The building is well adapted for the purpose of a Yachting Club; is neat and commodious; boasts a trim promenade and a small platform."

In the same year (1825) Lord Yarborough, a fine portrait of whom hangs in the dining room of the Castle, was elected as its first Commodore.

Two other events in the history of the Club may be here mentioned. In 1829 the Admiralty issued a warrant empowering members to wear the White Ensign of the Royal Navy, and, four years later, it was intimated that the King (William IV.), as an acknowledgment of the "National utility" of the Royal Yacht Club, had been pleased to express :—

"His gracious wish and pleasure that it shall be henceforth known and styled 'The Royal Yacht Squadron,' of which His Majesty is graciously pleased to consider himself the head."¹

In 1854 the Royal Yacht Squadron had cause to deplore the loss of its senior member, the Marquis of Anglesey, of Waterloo fame, who, as Governor of Cowes Castle, had made it his residence. He died there in May, and the lease devolved upon the Marquis of Conyngham, who, in the following year (1855), offered to transfer it to the Royal Yacht Squadron.

There was a general feeling among the members that the Club

¹ At the present time (1916) the number of steam-yachts owned by members of the Squadron is fifty-three. Of these, no less than forty-four are employed in services connected with the war, thus justifying that claim to "National Utility" to which allusion was made by King William IV. in 1833.

had outgrown the accommodation afforded by the house which they had occupied since 1825, and at a special general meeting, held at the "Thatched House" on December 4th, the offer was accepted.

The next few years are full of the details of the transactions which led to the transfer of the Squadron to its present quarters.

Considerable alterations were made to the building, under the direction of Mr. Salvin, a well-known architect of the day. The central portion of the old Castle, with its semi-circular battery on the northern side, and "The Mayne Towre," with the entrance on the south, remained as before, while additions, including an appropriate and well designed additional tower, were made on the western side. The ground on the south of the building was cleared of overgrown shrubs, and gave place to the lawn as we see it to-day.

Entries made by the signalman of that time make mention of the following incidents :—

"January 1st, 1858.—Lit the lamp on the battery for the first time.

March 15th, 1858.—Prince Albert, the Prince of Wales, and Lord Colville paid a visit to the Castle.

June 4th, 1858.—Stept the flagstaff on the point in front of the battery.

July 6th, 1858.—Hoisted the flag of the R.Y.S. at the Castle.

July 10th, 1858.—General meeting of members."

This concludes the record of that series of events which established the "Royal Yacht Squadron" in Cowes Castle.²

"Something like home, that is not home, is to be desired," says Temple. To many of the members of the Squadron this Castle is "like home," associated with happy recollections and with valued friendships.

Yachting, like other pastimes, is suspended during the continuance of the present war, but—

"HOPE SHALL BRIGHTEN DAYS TO COME,
AND MEMORY GILD THE PAST."

² The freehold of the Castle has been acquired from the Crown during the present year, 1917.

[Authorities consulted or quoted :—

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Probably the sketch preceding this article is unique, it was done by Emma Bacon, daughter of Thomas Bacon, Esq., then residing at Yaverland Manor. She married 1828, M. G. Thoyts, Esq., of Sulhampstead Park, Berks. Many of her sketches are in the possession of her grand-daughter, Mrs. Cope.
