

FROM MONASTERY TO CASTLE.

(Hampshire Castles : 27, Hurst Castle.)

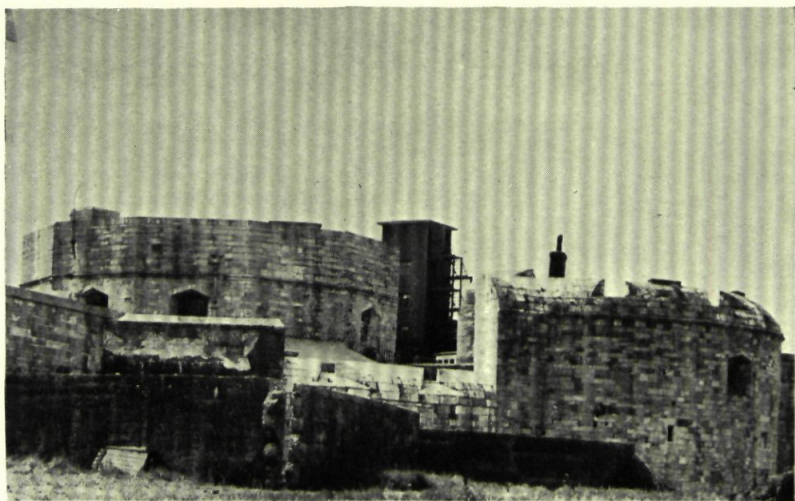
By F. W. ROBINS, F.S.A.

[Hurst Castle : Bus from Bournemouth or Lymington to Milford-on-Sea. Walk from Milford to Keyhaven, about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles, thence walk or ferry to Hurst Castle ; or walk along beach from Milford, about 3 miles.]

1541 : for ten years or more a " cold war " had been on between Henry VIII and the Pope, arising from the divorce of Catherine of Aragon. In the meantime, Henry had married Anne Boleyn and had her executed, Jane Seymour had died after giving birth to the future Edward VI, Anne of Cleves had been divorced, and Thomas Cromwell disgraced and executed. With the Emperor Charles V and King Francis I of France reconciled, and Henry no longer able to play one off against the other, 1066 seemed likely to repeat itself, with the Papal blessing on an invasion of England from the opposite side of the Channel. In 1536 the French had actually cut out a Flemish ship from Southampton and another ship from Portsmouth, and in 1538 a French crew boarded an English ship anchored off the Isle of Wight. Following the suppression of the lesser monasteries in 1536, the greater ones were dissolved in 1539. Some of their buildings were handed over to favourites at Court, some of the great monastic churches, such as Winchester, Canterbury and Gloucester, were preserved as cathedrals, some, like Christchurch Priory and Romsey Abbey, became parish churches, others such as Beaulieu, Netley, Tintern and many others lay derelict and empty, a fate which seemed to have peculiarly affected the Cistercian houses, probably because of their siting in the remote countryside.

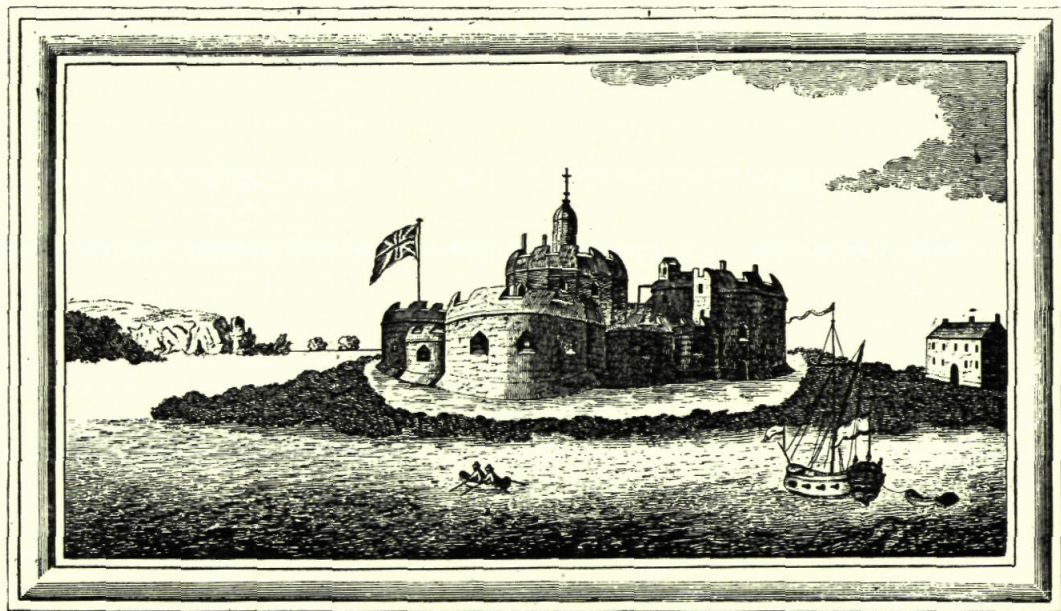
In 1539, Henry, astute, if unscrupulous, in the face of the French menace, commenced to fortify the south coast, building a series of castles or forts, ranging from Deal and Walmer in the south-east to Tresco in the Scillies. Braun (*The English Castle*) lists twenty-one of them, but there seem to have been more like thirty or so, including Tilbury (rebuilt later), Deal, Walmer, Camber Castle near Rye, Southsea, East and West Cowes (the latter now the headquarters of the Royal Yacht Squadron), Yarmouth and three others in the Isle of Wight, St. Andrews, at the mouth of the Hamble river, Netley, Calshot, now a R.A.F. flying boat station, Hurst, Brownsea in Poole Harbour, Portland, and Torre, near Torquay, which, like St. Andrews, has disappeared without trace. Some twelve or thirteen remain, wholly or in part. The construction seems to have started in the south-east, in 1539, gradually

PLATE VI



HURST CASTLE
The Tudor Central Tower and North-West Bastion

PLATE VII



Hurst Castle—Engraving, *circa* 1773.

progressing westward ; it was not until the following year that the work reached Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. It was not for want of materials. Quarr, Netley and Beaulieu Abbeys in the Hampshire area, Torre Abbey in Devon, lay only too handy as quarries, and the king directed his builders to despoil them. Quarr provided stone for the two castles at Cowes, Netley for those on Southampton Water, Beaulieu the lead for Calshot and the stone for Hurst, possibly also stone for Yarmouth. It is not possible to say with certainty which of the stones at Hurst Castle are from Beaulieu, but it may reasonably be assumed that the bulk, if not all, of the 16th century masonry is from the Abbey,¹ where the great and lovely church has disappeared altogether. So, in many ages, have the arts of peace and the labours of love been despoiled for the uses of war.

In 1539 the Earl of Southampton had reported that, with the rebuilding of an old tower on the Isle of Wight and the building of a castle on the "hard sand called the Hurst",² it would be possible to command all shipping entering the Solent from the west, the passage between Hampshire and the island being here only just over a mile wide. Yarmouth Castle does not seem to have been built until after a French landing on the Isle of Wight in 1544, and after the building of Hurst Castle it was reported that, if the shot from the several culverines and sakers mounted there did not reach such ships as pass the narrow strait "that is much frequented" they would at least threaten them—which is rather reminiscent of the tale of the man in charge of a steam disinfecter who, when told he had not left it on long enough to kill the germs, retorted "Ah, but see what a fright they had !"

Hurst Castle was put in hand in 1541 and finished in 1544. The standard plan for these Tudor castles was that of a central tower, analogous to the mediaeval keep, but with a curtain wall and from three to six bastions or outer towers, Camber Castle, in Sussex, being the most pretentious, with six lesser towers. Hurst has three semi-circular bastions and a twelve-sided central tower, the latter having two floors and a basement, as has also the north-west bastion, the only one remaining more or less in its original state. The others, consisting of basement and ground floor only, have been altered and obscured by later work. The main room of the centre tower is built around a central brick pier containing the staircase leading down to the magazine in the basement, and originally, no doubt, carried to the uppermost floor as well.

In 1545 a gunner was appointed at a wage of sixpence a day ; in the following year more gunners and a master gunner were

1. Mr. Tom Kitcher, of the Beaulieu Manor Estate, has recognised much of the masonry of the central tower as being identical with facing stones remaining at the Abbey.

2. "Sandbank" is an alternative meaning of "Hurst", otherwise a wood.

appointed, to serve twenty-four guns, ranging from a one-inch rabinet to an eight-inch cannon royal. The chief armament of these coast "castles", however, were culverins, of 5½ in. calibre, and sakers, of 3½ in., throwing balls of 17½ and 5½ lbs. weight respectively, with ranges of a mile and 1200 yards, the shot being of iron, stone or lead, principally, no doubt, judging from cannon balls of the period found in various places, the two former. The total permanent garrison consisted of the Governor and twenty-three men, the Governor and any prisoners being accommodated in the central tower, the Master Gunner in the north-west bastion—and the gunners in the three bastions, with the basements all in use for ammunition and stores.

In the time of Elizabeth I the danger had switched to Spain, but, despite work done in 1567, the gun platforms were in a bad state at the end of the 16th century; in true modern style a Commission was appointed in 1608 to survey the place and repairs were carried out in 1609. Yet, in 1628, with danger again from France, the castle was without powder and shot and only four or five of the twenty-seven guns were serviceable at all. Seven years later the brass guns were replaced by iron; whether anything had been done to them in the meantime is not recorded.

During the Civil War the castle had a parliamentary garrison and to it Charles I was brought as a prisoner from Carisbrooke on November 30th, 1648. It was possibly the second royal visit as Henry VIII is said to have personally inspected his coastal defences. Charles seems to have known it, as, when told he was being taken there he is reputed to have remarked "You could not have named a worse". It took three hours for him to cross the strait, with a favourable wind and tide. The room in which he lived and ate was described as "neither large nor lightsome; at noonday in winter requiring candles, and at night he had his wax lamp set in a basin, which illuminated his bedchamber. The air was noxious, by reason of the marish grounds which were about and the unwholesome vapours arising from the saragossos and weeds and salt water cast upon the shore and by the fogs that those marine places are subject to". The castle has salt water on both sides, being set on a curved spit of shingle forming the top of a submarine cliff two hundred feet high, the depth of the Solent channel close to the castle running to thirty-three fathoms. Charles was only there, however, for nineteen days, which may be said to cover most of Hurst's national history.

In 1649, again the Castle needed an Inquiry and strengthening. At the Restoration a proposal to abandon it was shelved and instead it was repaired and a proper garrison established, serving thirty guns, some of which must have been on the flat roof. It next comes into notice with the Napoleonic invasion threat, when the Martello towers were being built along the English and Channel Island

coasts. Then extensive alterations were made, principally to the central tower, the centre brick pier being rebuilt and adapted to give light to the basement magazine to avoid taking lanterns into it. At the same time an outwork, called the caponiere, was built on the north side, to provide covering fire along the seaward ditch, an idea which had already occurred to the mediaeval builders of Southampton's walls, with their projecting towers.

Further alterations in 1873, the insertion of additional accommodation on modern lines in the inside spaces, the adaptation of the roofs for modern guns, and the making of a completely new entrance in 1873, have altered the appearance of the castle and masked the Tudor work on the east and west. In 1933 the castle ceased to be occupied by the Army and became an ancient monument, only to be occupied again, temporarily, during the Second World War. Like some country market towns, Hurst wakens to life on occasion, only to fall back into slumber or obscurity in times between, when the stones of Beaulieu Abbey recapture their cloistered calm, though not their beauty, since, as one writer put it, these Tudor forts have "no architectural and little military importance".