

ART. XV.—*The fortifications at Whitehaven.* By DANIEL HAY, F.R.S.A., A.L.A.

Read at Carlisle, April 3rd, 1965.

THE earliest occasion on which we hear of fortifications at Whitehaven is on 8 April 1639, when Sir Christopher Lowther determined to resist any attempt by Parliamentary forces to land there and wrote to an acquaintance to say that he had bought “two pieces of ordinance (2 sacres) of Captain Bartlett, and his brother” and wanted two more as he proposed to “make a fortification for them on the peere”.¹

The next important occasion is in November 1745, when the town was put in a state of readiness to resist the Jacobites. James Ray in his *Compleat History of the Rebellion* says: “At this time *Whitehaven* had raised ten Companies of 50 men each, for the Defence of the Place, and raised Breastworks before the Avenues leading to the Town on which they planted Cannon; but on hearing that *Carlisle*, altho’ a strong Garrison, had surrendered, *Whitehaven* being an open Town, it was thought adviseable to dismount the Guns, and put them on board the Ships, that they might not fall into the enemy’s hands.”² The Minutes of the Town and Harbour Trustees for June 1746 show that £236. 7s. 3d. was paid by the treasurer of the Trustees as a result of the preparations to resist the Jacobites; this included £17. 2s. 6d. “paid by order to the Gunner of the Fort for his salary for three quarters, and charges of oiling the great guns”.³

In the Minutes for August 1740, there is a note of “Seven Guns of Four Pound Shot be added to the great Guns upon the Battery”;⁴ which I take to refer to the Lunette, or Half Moon Battery, and in August 1762 there is reference to “John Wooler, Esq. having pursu-

ant to an order from the Board of Ordnance made a Survey of the Harbour of Whitehaven, Forts and Coasts adjacent in order to Erect further Forts, Platforms and other Works necessary for the reception of the Guns and Stores his Majesty has been graciously pleased to order to be sent here for the Defence of the Town and Harbour, from any attempts that may be made thereupon by the Enemy in time of War, this Day delivered his Report to the Trustees, together with the Plans of the Buildings to be erected necessary for the Reception of the said Guns and Stores, and for the further Protection and Security of the Town and Harbour. Ordered that the said plans be laid before Sir James Lowther Bart and the Gentlemen of the Town, for their Consideration, in order to be carried into execution with all convenient speed, and that the Estimates be made of the charge and Expense of Erecting the said Works.”⁵

On 21 March 1763 the Trustees “Ordered that the Guns in the Lunette Battery be dismounted, and properly laid on Beds, the Carriages put into the Storehouse and that two of the Six Pounders be removed from the Old Fort, to the Lunette Battery, and then mounted, that the Ten Eighteen Pounders be likewise dismounted and properly laid on Beds, and the Carriages put into the Store houses. That the Forty two and Twenty four Pound Guns be placed on Beds under the Shed in the Harbour yard, and the carriages put into the Storehouse and that such of the Stores as can be put into the Storehouse placed there and all the Guns and Carriages that want painting be sufficiently painted.”⁶ We hear nothing more about the fortification of Whitehaven until 23 April 1778, when John Paul Jones raided the town, spiked the guns at the Fort and at the Half Moon Battery and attempted to set fire to the shipping.⁷ According to a statement made by John Paul Jones, quoted by Lincoln Lorenz from Le citoyen Andre’s *Memoires de Paul Jones* which is said to have been dictated by Jones: “We spiked thirty-six cannon of the fort and battery.”⁸

Mrs Reginald de Koven in *The Life and Letters of John Paul Jones* quotes Jones as saying that the townspeople of Whitehaven "found at least thirty heavy cannon, the instruments of their vengeance, rendered useless".⁹

After the raid the townspeople subscribed £857 within the space of four days to put the defences of the town in order.¹⁰ According to Parson & White's *Directory* for 1829 "an additional supply of guns was received from Woolwich making the total number 98, of which 18 were 36 pounders, and 12 thirty-two".¹¹ I am certain that this figure of 98 is an error and that the number was considerably less than that. The number of strong points was increased to five. A battery was placed on the cliff top above the Half Moon Battery, another on the top of Bransty Brow and another, known as the Jack-a-Dandy Battery on the site of the Old Gasworks, near William Pit.

If one analyses the statement about these fortifications as they were about 1810, as related in Mannix and Whellan's *Directory of Cumberland*¹² (1847), there were:

42-pounders	mounted	.	3
	dismounted	.	3
	unserviceable	.	4
24-pounders	mounted	.	8
	unserviceable	.	8
18-pounders	mounted	.	7
	dismounted	.	10
			—
Total		.	43
			—

In May 1903 the late Mr Joseph Wear who had a profound knowledge of local history wrote to the *Whitehaven News* about these old fortifications and quoted from an article which had appeared in a local newspaper of some thirty years previously. From this account the disposition seems to have been:

Old Fort	.	8/9 guns
Half Moon Battery	.	9 guns
Sea Brows Battery	.	7/8 guns
Jack-a-Dandy Battery	.	6 guns
Bransty Battery	.	5 guns
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Total	.	35/37 guns
		<hr/>

This account is not very specific. All that one can deduce from it is that the Half Moon Battery consisted of nine large guns and that there were eight or nine guns at the Fort. The Seabrows Battery had seven or eight guns of varying calibre; the Bransty Battery consisted of two 42-pounders and three long 18's, while the Jack-a-Dandy Battery was composed of six guns of 36- and 42-pounder calibre. The guns of this latter battery were removed about 1819.

In November 1817 the Minutes of the Town and Harbour Trustees notes that extensive damage had been done by the sea to the Half Moon Battery. This was repaired at the expense of the Trustees.¹³

Correspondence with Mr Dalrymple, store-keeper, Carlisle, shows that there were at Whitehaven in 1818 ten 42-pounders, eight 32-pounders, eight 24-pounders and ten 18-pounders.¹⁴

In the following year the Ordnance Officer proposed to withdraw all the guns from Whitehaven, but at the request of the trustees the guns at the Fort and Half Moon Battery were retained. Two brass field-pieces were sent to Carlisle and the heavy pieces to Plymouth. This correspondence shows that there were at this time at the Fort "Eight Guns mounted on Iron Carriages".¹⁵

A more exact picture is obtained from a document¹⁶ in the Public Record Office, dated 21 February 1820, listing the heavy ordnance at Whitehaven. The sites and guns are as follows:

Redness Point, on the Heights	
Dismounted and skidded	. 3 42-pounders
Bransty, near high water	
Dismounted and skidded	. 2 18-pounders
	. 4 42-pounders
Bowling Green	
Dismounted and skidded	. 3 42-pounders
Thwaitefield, on the Heights	
Dismounted and skidded	. 3 18-pounders
Half Moon Battery under the cliffs at high water	. 8 32-pounders
Fort on the New Quay	
Dismounted and skidded	. 5 18-pounders
Mounted on iron carriages	. 8 24-pounders
Commands the entrance to the Harbour	
	—
Total Cannons	. 36
	—

It would appear that the guns were last fired in 1824 on the occasion of the laying of the foundation stone of the West Pier. For a number of years two old artillery pensioners looked after the guns and the Fort but it seems to have been abandoned about 1830 and the largest of the guns taken to Woolwich. About the same time the guns of the Sea Brows Battery were taken away. All of them cannot have been removed because Mannix and Whellan indicate that in 1847 one battery remained, although in rather a useless state. Referring to the Jack-a-Dandy Battery the following note appears in the index to the minutes of the Town and Harbour Trustees:

“Memoranda: The scite of this Fort or Platform was situated a little beyond the last Ship Building Yard in a line with William Pit Raised Waggon Way and then placed nearly on the Level of High Water Mark; the Guns supplied were 42 Pounds, these and all other Guns that were placed on the Heights and in and about this Town for its protection, were recalled by order of the noble Duke of Wellington and the Government, and being a party to the negotiation and transmission of all these Guns I am induced to make this declaration — John Peile then a Trustee — the date of recall was during the high and prevailing state of Chartism and Radicalism

in the Nation — A few guns and Iron Carriages were allowed to be retained in the Harbour Fort where they now remain by consent of the Government Authorities. The noble Duke replaced a pair 6 pound field pieces to the care of the late Earl of Lonsdale in the place of a pair taken away by General Grindall and now remain in the possession of the present Earl. Sep. 1850 — John Peile.”

Nicholson and Peile's *Directory of Whitehaven* (1864) has a short note¹⁷ about the old fortifications, and concludes: “The only battery now, however, belonging to the town is the one recently constructed for the use of artillery Volunteers, on the hill above Wellington Pit.”

This in turn suffered from subsidence. In April 1872 there was a great landslip at the Sea Brows which brought thousands of tons of rock and soil crashing down upon the site of the Half Moon Battery. The newspaper account of the incident shows that the battery consisted of two guns and that neither came down with the débris. About this period, four old guns were removed from the site of Half Moon Battery and taken to Chester.

Guns were on the Sea Brows Battery site within the memory of many persons now living but seem to have been removed during the course of the first World War.

References

- ¹ HMC, Thirteenth Report, Appendix, VII. Manuscripts of the Earl of Lonsdale (1893) 88.
- ² James Ray, *A compleat history of the Rebellion* (Bristol, 1752), 105-106.
- ³ Minutes of the Whitehaven Town and Harbour Trustees, i 119. Note: The original minutes of the Town and Harbour Trustees are missing. A copy of the minutes covering the period 1709-1840 was made by Mr Charles Bell, Surveyor of Taxes, in four folio volumes. These were acquired by Mr John Peile, colliery agent for the Earl of Lonsdale, and lodged in Whitehaven Castle. They are now in Whitehaven Public Library.
These original minutes from 1812 are also in the Library.
- ⁴ *Ibid.* 103.
- ⁵ *Ibid.* 191.
- ⁶ *Ibid.* 201.
- ⁷ *Cumberland Pacquet*, 28 April 1778.
- ⁸ Lincoln Lorenz, *John Paul Jones, fighter for freedom* (Annapolis, 1943), 147 and note.
- ⁹ Mrs Reginald de Koven, *The life and letters of John Paul Jones* (2 vols. New York, 1930), i 279.

- 10 William Parson and William White, *History, directory and gazetteer of the counties of Cumberland and Westmorland* (Leeds, 1829), 249.
The *Cumberland Pacquet*, 5 May 1778, has a list of subscribers and the amounts given by each.
- 11 Mannix and Whellan, *History, gazetteer and directory of Cumberland* (Beverley, 1847), 383.
- 12 Parson and White, *op. cit.*, 249-250.
- 13 Town and Harbour Trustee Minutes, iii 47.
- 14 *Ibid.* 57-61.
- 15 *Ibid.* 71-72.
- 16 P.R.O., WO 44/518.
- 47 Letter by Joseph Wear, quoted in an article in the *Whitehaven News*, 12 December 1946.
- 18 *A Directory of Whitehaven and vicinity* (Peile and Nicholson, Whitehaven, 1864).