



The History of Roch Castle

1195

Roch Castle was built in the late twelfth century. It is located at the division of English and Welsh speaking Wales, an imaginary line crossing west to east through southern Wales that was, and still is known, as the "landsker line".

At the time of its construction, Roch Castle served as one of a group of border strongholds that fortified Anglicised Wales from the independent Welsh to the North, guarding the Flemish settlers who inhabited the surrounding "hundred of Rhoos", and it also served as a lookout for the bay of St Brides to ward off invasions from the sea.

The first known inhabitant of the castle was a Norman knight by the name of Adam de Rupe. His name probably derived from the rock on which the castle was built, "de Rupe" being "charter" latin for "of the rock". This name however was soon changed to the Norman (or French) "de la Roche".

Adam de Rupe's ancestors were of the first rank of Norman families and had the province of the "hundred of Rhoos" committed to their care (probably) by Henry II. Their authority extended from Newgale to Milford Haven. Benton Castle marked the other extremity of their domain. However, the Castle of Roche was the family seat, and a member of the family was visited with the hereditary title of "Comes Littoris", or "Count of the Shore".

A legend recounts that Adam de Rupe erected his abode on a rock as a result of a prophecy that he would die from the bite of a viper. His precaution was in vain, as he met his fate when a viper, carried into the castle in a bundle of firewood, bit and killed him.

Adam de Rupe is also known for having founded the Priory of Pill, South of Haverfordwest. He endowed the priory with four parishes: Saint Kewit (Cewydd) of Steynton, St Mary of Rupe (Roche), St David of Newcastle, and St Nicholas of New Mote.

1300

The de la Roche family resided at Roche Castle for many decades defending the area from the frequent forays of the Welsh. Several generations of the family were buried in Pill Priory, and the Llangwm branch of the family in the (Roche) chapel there. The effigies of one de la Roche and his wife are shown to visitors to this day.

The properties and estates making up the "barony" of Roche at this time were very extensive, and included Roche, Nolton, Camrose and Trefgarn. Old maps show that the area immediately adjacent to the castle was called the moat and there is one document showing that rights of pasturage in the moat were valued at two marks.

Part of the de la Roche family accompanied English forces to Ireland on one of their expeditions in the fourteenth century, eventually taking up residence there, and became known as Viscounts Fermay. Their descendants continue to be important in Ireland.



1397

In this year the manor of Roche was leased to Henry Bart, esquire. Henry was "to guard the castle and prisoners and undertake necessary carpentry and masonry repairs to the castle as needed".

1420

When Thomas de la Roche of Roche died in 1420, he left no sons. Thus, the direct male line of the de la Roches ended in this year. He did however, leave two daughters who inherited the castle. Daughter Ellen married Edmund de Ferrars, fifth lord of Chartley, and daughter Elizabeth married Sir George Longueville.

1520

By the reign of Henry VIII, a contemporary Lord Ferrars and a Sir John Longueville were the owners of the property.

1560

During the reign of Queen Elizabeth, it is recorded that the Earl of Essex and the Earl of Longueville were the possessors of Roche. It then passed to their descendants who maintained possession until 1601.

1601

About this time, the castle and "manor" of Roche passed to the Walter family of Rosemarket (apparently by sale).

1630

The Walter family was an important family of Pembrokeshire. About 1630, William and Elizabeth Walter gave birth to a daughter, Lucy, who became a mistress of King Charles II bearing his child, the Duke of Monmouth.

1642

Parliament became extremely restive under King Charles I, and soon openly rebelled under Cromwell's leadership. In 1644, King Charles garrisoned many of the castles in South Wales and supplied a garrison for Roche Castle under the command of Captain Francis Edwards of Summerhill (he being from a neighbouring estate).

On February 17th, 1644, the castle was attacked by Cromwell's troops under the command of Colonel Roland Laugharne. After a fierce siege, the castle was surrendered on February 25th, having been badly damaged by cannon and also by fire.



The story goes that, during the attack by Cromwell's troops, Cromwell was hit by a javelin thrown from an eyelet window by Captain Edwards, striking Cromwell's helmet and knocking it off which resulted in his having to flee from the battle temporarily. This could not have happened to Cromwell, as he was not present in Wales until 1648. It may have happened to the commander of the troops, Colonel Laugharne. An eye witness account of this episode told to Fenton in 1745 by a woman who claimed to be 110 years old described Roche Castle in flames and a high ranking officer in uniform, minus his helmet, riding away from the castle at high speed and in great disarray. During these war years, the Walter family took refuge in London. Young Lucy eventually proceeded to the Hague, where she stayed during the remainder of the Civil War.

Later in 1644, on July 7th, the castle was recaptured from Cromwell's troops by a fresh Royalist force commanded by Sir Charles Gerard. Included in the capture that day were three hundred head of cattle and fifteen hundred sheep, which had been gathered in the castle grounds to provision Cromwell's troops in the area.

1645

The castle once again was in the hands of Parliamentarian forces and remained so until the Restoration. In the meantime, Lucy Walter, still in Hague, met King Charles II there, possibly renewing an acquaintance that had been made earlier, and became his mistress in 1648. Their intimacy continued for a number of years thereafter.

1650

Lucy's father died, and the property of Roche descended to her brother, Richard Walter, who in 1656, held the post of High Sheriff of Pembrokeshire. A later Richard Walter was knighted and served as High Sheriff in 1727.

1658

Lucy died in Paris at the age of 28 leaving a child who had been acknowledged by King Charles II as his son, and whom the King created Duke of Monmouth.

1700

For the next two hundred years, the castle was evidently unoccupied and slowly fell into ruin, the roofs and interior crumbling away but the walls remaining intact. Sometime near the end of the eighteenth century, the property came into the hands of John Harries of Trevacon, probably by purchase.

1800

About 1800, the properties were again sold, this time to Rees Stokes of Cuffern. Upon his death, the castle and properties passed to the eldest son, John Stokes – Stokes of Cuffern, who sold the properties to his sister, Elizabeth Rees, about 1840. Upon her death on June 15, 1845, the property



became the possession of her son, John Stokes. On his death on January 1, 1888, the castle was inherited by his daughter, Emma Elizabeth Rhys Massey. On May 6, 1899, she sold the castle to John Wynford Phillips of Lydstep House ((the first Viscount St Davids)b .

1900

In 1900, the then owner of Roche Castle, the first Viscount St Davids, needing a country seat in the northern part of Pembrokeshire, embarked on the rebuilding of the castle in earnest, and, in 1902, he had completed a remarkable restoration from a very real ruin. In addition, he added a wing on the north in the same style, and he and his family occupied the castle for many years.

One of his frequent house guests was David Lloyd George, Great Britain's Prime Minister from 1916 to 1922.

1929

In 1929, the castle was transferred in trust to the Viscount St David's son (the Honourable Jestyn Reginald Austen Plantagenet Philipps).

1954

In 1954, the castle and properties were purchased by the Honourable John Michael Howard Whitfield, he being the son of Lord Kenswood (the first Baron Kenswood of Saint Maryleborie, London). Subsequently, Lord and Lady Kenswood, parents of the owner, took up residence and further restored the interior.

1965

Upon the death of the first Lord Kenswood in 1963, the Dowager Lady Kenswood, his second wife, continued to reside in the castle until the spring of 1965, when Lord Kenswood (the second Baron Kenswood) sold the castle to Hollis MacLure Baker, an American furniture manufacturer.

1972

Early in 1972, William David Berry moved into the castle as a home. Subsequently Mr Berry's work took him to Belgium for three years and in 1977 he decided to make the castle self-supporting by letting it as a holiday home. For many years thereafter this gave great pleasure to his many visitors while providing essential maintenance funds.

2008

In September of 2008 the Griffiths Roch Foundation bought the Castle from David and Susan Berry and in February of 2009 awarded the contract for its restoration and refurbishment to Welsh Heritage Construction under the design and supervision of architects Acanthus Holden. Roch Castle reopened in 2013 as a six bedroom luxury hotel.



TWR Y FELIN HOTEL
ROCH CASTLE HOTEL
PENRHIW HOTEL
Pembrokeshire, Wales

Keith Griffiths named the bedroom Ap Gruffydd after Rhys Ap Gruffydd (the Lord Rhys) who had taken control of many Norman Castles in South West Wales following the death of King Henry II in 1189. Roch was probably strengthened to a stone castle at this time to protect from the Lord Rhys.

The Lord Rhys tomb with an excellent statue of him is in St Davids Cathedral.