

Fortified and Wildly Romantic Historic Cornish Fort

Polhawn Fort, dramatically posed on a cliff overlooking the sandy beaches of Whitsand Bay in Cornwall, offers an exclusive opportunity to unwind, far from prying eyes. With a private beach, large lawn and all-weather tennis court, Polhawn Fort is hired out for exclusive use where you have the entire place to yourselves, and can do pretty much as you like.

Situated in a designated area of outstanding natural beauty, the Fort provides superb walks into the further reaches of Mount Edgcumbe Country Park and along the South Cornwall coastal footpath.

The Fort is hidden in a corner on the famous Rame Head Peninsula at the end of a half mile drive, untouched by the ravages of civilisation. From the moment you walk across the working draw-bridge and down the spiral staircases into the grand arched and vaulted Napoleonic Hall, your visit will be quite unforgettable.

Constructed in the 1860s as part of the Napoleonic fortifications defending the naval base of Plymouth, for many years the Grade II * listed Fort was an extraordinary and fascinating Cornish family home. Polhawn Fort is one of a number of forts known, because they were never used in military action, as Palmerston's Follies.

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Architecturally designed to be ready for action, this military building includes many fortification features intended to protect occupants under attack. The main entrance to the fort is at roof level across a unique drawbridge that pivots in the middle and operates through a quick release mechanism, which a single soldier could action if under surprise attack from the hillside.

The Fort's construction is massive. The foundations are cut into solid rock, the internal walls are three feet thick, the ceilings have a minimum thickness of six feet, and the outer wall is no less than eight feet thick. Constructed entirely from solid masonry, all structural support throughout is of arched and vaulted brickwork. The ballast roof is covered by a soft concrete, designed to absorb bomb impact; a rounded stonework corbel projecting along the Fort walls prevents attackers scaling the walls with ladders.

This imposing structure was designed to hold seven cannons, the seven large arched and vaulted areas on its main floor a casemate for each cannon.

The grand arched and vaulted Napoleonic Hall comprises four arched casemates - whose cannons intentionally face the cliffs, beaches and shallow waters of Whitsand Bay to prevent enemy landings. Three further casemates face slightly more out to sea. Originally linked, these are now each a separate bedroom, comprising two Emperor Suites and one Admiral's room (with four-poster bed).

All rooms, with the exception of the kitchen, face the sea and offer panoramic sea views. The sitting room and upper bedrooms still feature the original circular cannon front racer rings just inside the embrasures (front windows).

Everything about the Fort was designed to minimise the risk of sparks or accidental explosion including door hinges, which were made of brass instead of wrought iron. Before entering the Magazine, which housed the fort's gunpowder and explosives, soldiers had to enter a wooden floored

changing room to remove boots and any metal equipment, and then put on special slippers and smocks.

The Magazine is a windowless room with an inner lining of brick wall with openings for ventilation, and has the only truly original door in the Fort. Now housing the central heating boiler, the warmth belies the fact that this used to be a cold dark tomb-like place. Pencilled protestations, still clearly visible on the walls, tell us that it doubled as a prison cell for errant soldiers at the beginning of the First World War.

The wooden fixings, previously operating as rifle wall brackets set into the Fort's interior walls, and the ready use cupboard designed to keep cannon ammunition on hand (now a bathroom), demonstrate the Fort's readiness for action.

A genuine 24-pounder "Blomefield" cannon dating from around 1809 is also on view in the Fort grounds beneath the drawbridge. This type of cannon was in service in Nelson's ships of the line when fighting Napoleon Bonaparte's navy, and it probably spent the first part of its active life at sea before being transferred to land use in forts that were designed for it.



Wedding in the Fort

Today, Polhawn Fort is managed by Kathy Deakin. It is owned by John and Teresa Wicksteed, recently featured in the final episode of "Michael Winner's Dining Stars" aired on ITV1. The Fort is principally used as a wedding venue (approx 100 weddings a year, 1,500 to date) and is available to hire for a weekend or mid-week without caterers or staff.

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