

The history and legend behind Roch Castle

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Here we take a look at the history of Roch Castle including the legend.

Roch Castle is a 12th century castle located on the 'landsker line' where the division was said to have been between the English and Welsh speaking parts of Wales.

The castle was built in 1195 by Norman knight Adam de Rupe and this is where the legend comes into play.

The legend says that de Rupe ordered the castle to be built after a witch's prophecy.

The witch told him that he will die from a snake bite within a year, unless he managed to make it throughout the year without being bitten – if he did so, he would live a long and healthy life.

He then ordered for the castle to be built and retired to the highest room of the castle, intending to spend the year there.

However, his plan is said to not have worked as while he was successful for most of the year, when it came to winter, he needed to stay warm so asked a servant to get some wood for a fire. The servant returned with some logs but they had not been checked thoroughly and a snake lurking in a log bit de Rupe and he died shortly after.

It is known that once the castle was built, it was a stronghold that fortified Anglicised Wales, serving to protect the Flemish settlers from the threat of the Welsh to the north. The de Rupe family (which is believed later changed its name to de la Roche) was given authority over the area of Pembrokeshire between Milford Haven and Newgale.

De Rupe had a religious fame around the area, founding the Priory of Pill and endowed it with the parishes Saint Kewit of Steynton, St Mary of Rupe, St David of Newcastle and St Nicholas of New Mote.

The family lived at the castle for a number of decades and were responsible for defending the area from Welsh attack. In the 1300s, members of the family were frequent visitors to Ireland as they accompanied the English forces across the sea. They would take up residence there and be known as Viscounts Fermay.

The castle was leased out in 1397 to a Henry Bart. He was ordered to guard the castle and prisoners and if needed, to make repairs.

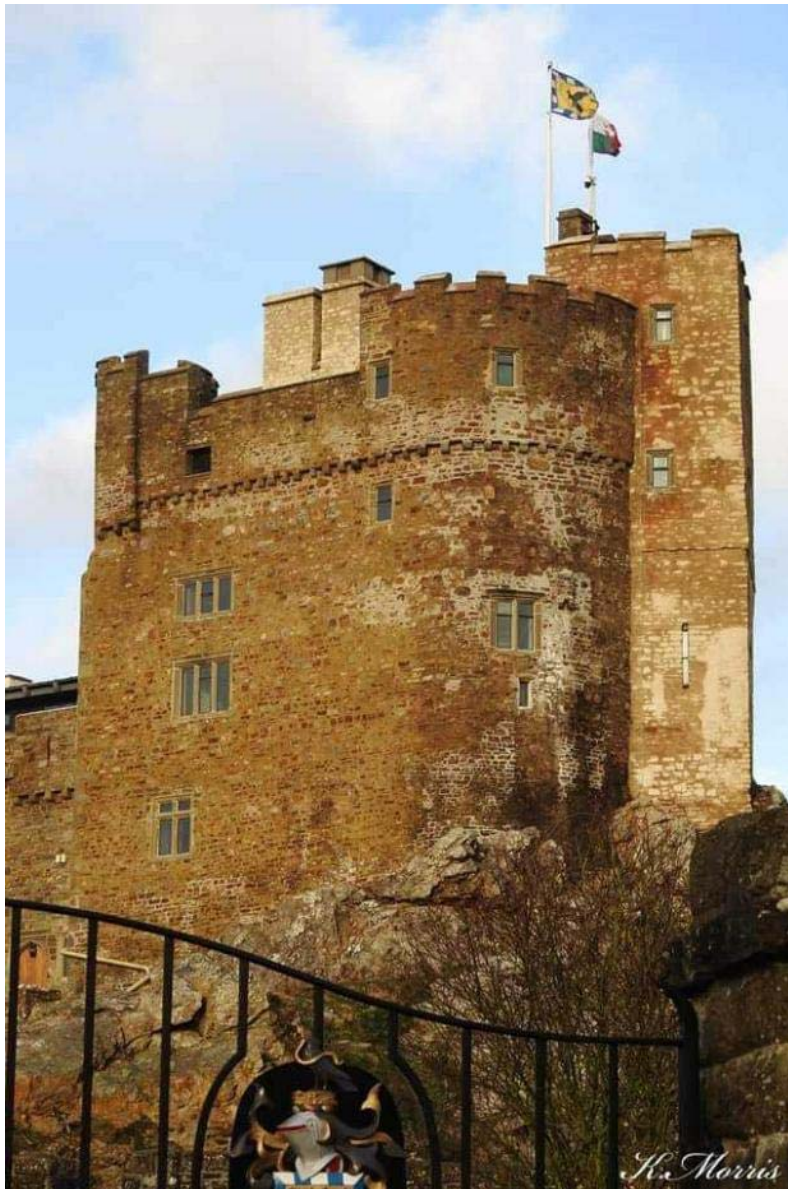
In 1420, the de la Roche male line of heirs died out with Thomas, so the castle was inherited by his daughters Ellen and Elizabeth. The pair married into nobility, with Ellen marrying the fifth Lord of Chartley, Edmund de Ferrars and Elizabeth, Sir George Longueville.

The male heirs would later inherit this castle as in 1520 it is noted that the proprietors were Lord Ferrars and Sir John Longueville. 40 years after this, the Earl of Essex and the Earl of Longueville were owners of the castle and their descendants remained in charge for a further 41 years.

It was in 1601 when the castle changed hands outside of the families as it is believed it was sold to the Walters of Rosemarket. In 1630, their daughter Lucy was born and she would later have the fated Duke of Monmouth as a child with King Charles II – a story we will cover later.

In 1642, Roch Castle was garrisoned on the order of King Charles I, with the garrison being under command of Captain Francis Edwards.

This was to be a wise move, as two years later on February 17, 1644, Oliver Cromwell's Parliamentarian troops attacked the castle. They were led by Colonel Roland Laugharne. The garrison held out for nine days before surrendering the castle to the Parliamentarians.



The damage to the castle was severe but the Walter family were safe as they had moved to London during the war, with Lucy being sent away from any potential harm to the Hague.

Cromwell's troops were not in command of the castle for long as in July of the same year, it was recaptured by Sir Charles Gerrard and his band of Royalist troops. They also captured 300 cattle and 1,500 sheep which had been at the castle to provide provision to Cromwell's forces.

The following year, the castle was again

recaptured by the Parliamentarians. It remained under their control until the Restoration in 1660.

In the same year the castle was recaptured by Cromwell's troops, Lucy would meet King Charles II and in 1648, became his mistress. The couple would have a child together the following year, James Scott, who would be created Duke of Monmouth.

In 1650, Roch Castle was passed to Lucy's brother Richard following the death of their father. Six years later, he would be given the job of High Sheriff of Pembrokeshire. Lucy would die in the Netherlands in 1658.

From around 1700, the castle, like many during the time period, would be left unoccupied and fall into ruin, the walls would remain intact but the roofs and interior would crumble. Towards the end of the 1700s, it is believed the castle was bought by John Harries, however in 1800, would be sold again to Rees Stokes. His son would inherit the castle but would sell it to his own sister Elizabeth Rees in 1840. She would

call the castle her own until her death five years later when it would pass to her son John Stokes.

In 1888 his daughter Emma Elizabeth Rhys Massey inherited the castle and 11 years later she sold it to the first Viscount of St Davids – John Wynford Phillips. At the start of the 20th century, the Viscount began to rebuild the castle, intending on using it as a country seat.

This restoration was completed just two years later and he added a wing to the north of the castle in the same style.

The Phillips' would occupy the castle for a number of years and it was frequently visited by David Lloyd George, who would go on to be the UK's Prime Minister.

The castle would be passed to the Viscount's son the honourable Jestyn Phillips in 1929 and in 1954, the castle was bought by the honourable John Whitfield, the son of Lord Kenswood.

Lord and Lady Kenswood would take up residence at the castle and would continue restoration of the interior of the property. Lord Kenswood died in 1963 and his wife the Dowager Lady Kenswood remained in the property until 1965 when it was sold by Lord Kenswood's son to Hollis MacLure Baker, an American furniture manufacturer.

In 1972, the castle became home to William Berry, who decided that he would let out the castle in 1977 as a holiday home.

The castle remained as a holiday home for a number of years while the funds generated would allow for any repairs needing to be done.

The Griffiths Roch Foundation bought the castle from David and Susan Berry in 2008 and gave Welsh Heritage Construction the contract to refurbish and restore the castle under the watchful eye of architects Acanthus Holden.

In 2013, the castle reopened as a six-bedroom luxury hotel, which it remains to this day.

There are stories that the castle is haunted, with people saying that de Rupe frequently wanders the upper floors and that people have seen a ghost of a woman who is believed to have been the daughter of one of the families who occupied the castle throughout the centuries.