

# TENBY



*Naws am Le  
Sense of Place*

## *Dinbych (reconstruction)*

### *Dinbych - 'Little Fortress'*

On Castle Hill more than 10 centuries ago there was a fort. It is described in a Welsh poem 'In Praise of Tenby' (see a mural interpretation of the poem on the Castle Hill). This fortress gave Tenby its name, deriving from Dinbych - little fortress.

How vulnerable the coast was is revealed by Viking place names like Caldey and on Tenby's north shore, Goscar Rock.



### *The Off-shore Islands*

Caldey was a monastic island from the early Christian period to the dissolution of religious houses in the reign of Henry VIII (1509–47). The present community of a reformed order of Cistercians was founded in 1929. The fort on St Catherine's was part of the defences of Milford Haven. Building was commenced in 1867. St Margaret's is a bird sanctuary.

### *The Middle Ages*

The recorded history of Tenby starts from the Norman conquest of Pembroke and its adjacent territory in the late 11th century. Where the 'little fortress' had been, a castle was built (first mentioned in 1153). The town was enclosed on its landward side by a ditch and a high earthen rampart. But these were progressively replaced by stone curtain walls, towers and heavily defended gates. Defensive works fortified the head of the harbour and the isthmus joining the town to the Castle Hill. In 1457 Earl Jasper Tudor conveyed the walls to the burgesses. At a crucial period in the Wars of the Roses (1471), Jasper and his nephew Henry Tudor (future Henry VII), as fugitive Lancastrians, were sheltered in the town before sailing into exile from which they returned in 1485 and marched to Bosworth where Richard III was defeated.

### *The Borough*

Privileges were granted by the Earls of Pembroke and Kings of England. Some of the charters are preserved at Tenby Museum. Elizabeth I's charter of 1581 made Tenby a corporate borough, and granted a three-day fair celebrating the Feast of St Margaret. The common seal of the burgesses of Tenby, dates from the 14th or 15th century: the obverse possibly represents the town's North gate; the reverse depicts a ship, a symbol of Tenby's sea trade.



*The  
Borough  
Seal*



## **Trade**

Royal grants of harbour dues in the 14th and 15th centuries financed the maintenance of the town walls and also enclosure of the harbour by a curving stone pier, near the end of which stood the first St Julian's Chapel.

Medieval seamen sailed along the coast to centres like Bristol and also to Ireland, Brittany, western France, Portugal and Spain, exporting cargoes of coal, hides and wool and returning with canvas cloth, iron, salt, pitch, flax, wine, vinegar and oil.

In the 16th century trade with coastal towns such as Bristol, Barnstaple and Ilfracombe was dominant. Continental trade was affected adversely by the Elizabethan wars; even so, amongst the imports recorded were oranges from Portugal in 1566.



***Tudor Merchants House***

## **The Civil Wars 1642-1649**

Except for a brief period in 1643-4, Tenby was in Parliamentary hands in the first civil war. When in Royalist hands in 1643 the town was bombarded from the sea by Parliamentary ships in support of a land advance by Rowland Laugharne which was aborted. Laugharne returned and took the town in 1644. In the second civil war (1648) part of an anti-Cromwellian force, in flight after the Battle of St Fagan's, took refuge in Tenby. This brought Parliamentarians including Oliver Cromwell to the area, and after a siege the town and castle fell to Colonel Horton of the New Model Army.

## **Change of Role**

Tenby's trade declined in the 17th century because of plague and civil war and the increasingly dominant place held by Bristol. However, the 18th century saw a growing interest in the healthgiving qualities of the sea.



**Laston House**

### **Sir William Paxton 1745 -1824**

Sir William Paxton of Middleton Hall in Carmarthenshire, contributed to the regeneration of Tenby. In 1805 he leased land above the harbour to provide salt water baths and the Assembly Rooms. A Greek quotation which reads in translation 'the sea washes away all the ills of men', is above the door of the old bath house, Laston House.

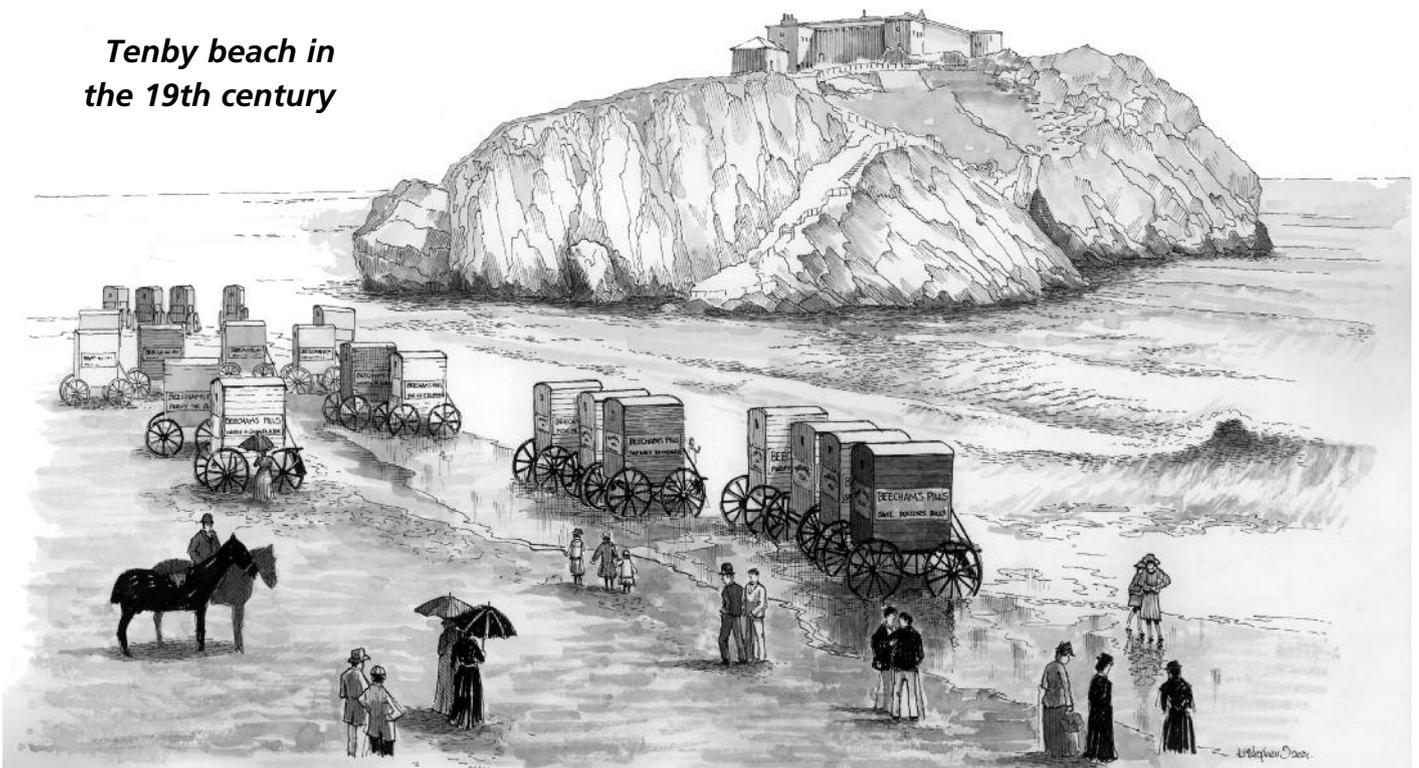
It has become the motto of Tenby's coat of arms. Other projects involved the water supply and road system, and rebuilding the Globe Inn (now Tenby House) as an elegant family town house.

### **The Resort**

In the early nineteenth century wealthy visitors arrived by coach or by sea via Bristol for the season, which extended from May to October. There was a wide choice of entertainment including balls, horse racing, bowls, archery, billiards, card rooms, a small theatre in Frog Street and sea bathing.

Fashionable society paraded on the Croft and Castle Hill and the Visitors List noted the order of precedence for calling cards. Apart from some county families, the local people were not part of this scene; but it was their industry. The population expanded from approximately 1000 in 1801, to about 3500 in 1851 when Tenby was as large as Eastbourne.

**Tenby beach in the 19th century**



With the arrival of the railway the South Cliff area was marked out for development. The trains also brought day-trippers and the range of amusements was extended. A pier and a bandstand were built to commemorate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897. The high spot of the winter season was Hunt Week, with its balls and theatricals. A new influence in the inter-war years, was the growth of private motoring. During World War II Tenby was a barracks for troops in training including Belgians and Americans, but after the war, the visitors returned. Several large houses became hotels and caravan sites sprang up in farmland developments. A range of first class leisure attractions have developed in the vicinity. Patterns of holiday-making have changed but Tenby remains in the top category of family holiday resorts.

### ***The Main Ecclesiastical Buildings***

St Mary's Church is first recorded about 1210, but there was probably a church on the site before that. The splendid spire, 152ft high, is one of the local landmarks.

Most of the windows date from Victorian restoration work. A ring of five bells was recorded in 1659 and four of the present eight date back to 1789.

A 15th century bell, which once hung outside the spire to sound the curfew, is now in St Thomas' Chapel. The clock commemorates Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee but the first clock to be recorded was in 1650.

The ruined wall with two arches to the west of the church is assumed to be all that remains of a college building. Amongst many commemorated in the Church is Robert Recorde born c. 1510 in Tenby, an eminent mathematician and scholar, and inventor of the equals sign.

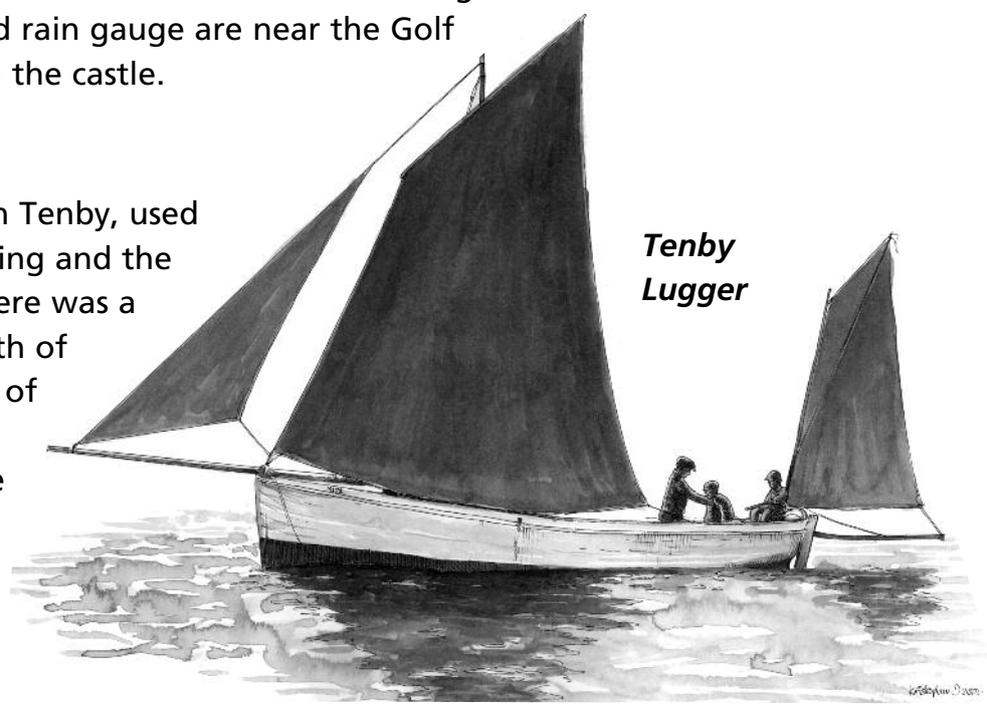
The Roman Catholic Church outside the Five Arches was built in 1893. Amongst other churches are Deer Park Baptist, opened in 1885, and St John's United Reformed, originally a Congregational Chapel built in 1868. The meeting place of the Salvation Army in Upper Park Road is on the site of the original Baptist Chapel.

### ***Weather Station***

The weather has been officially observed at Tenby since 1892, and the records are published daily in the Times and can be seen at the Meteorological Office Archives in Bracknell. The thermometers and rain gauge are near the Golf Club, and the sunshine meter on the castle.

### ***Boats***

Luggers were open boats built in Tenby, used mainly for line and drift-net fishing and the dredging of oysters (in which there was a big trade). Up to 25 feet in length of keel, the luggers were nearly all of similar design and rig, and usually had a crew of two. There were 49 Tenby luggers in use in 1891.



Tenby lifeboats have a history of almost one hundred and fifty years, during which there have been more than twelve lifeboats, three lifeboat stations, and hundreds of lives have been saved. Family traditions are strong in the service, and a number of lifeboat men have received national bravery awards. Tenby is also a coastguard station.

### **Victorian Naturalists**

Interest in natural history and particularly the cliffs and foreshore of Tenby and Carmarthen Bay, resulted in a number of eminent naturalists visiting the town. Amongst them were T.H.Huxley and P.H. Gosse, whose book 'Tenby a Seaside Holiday' became essential reading for fashionable visitors. Throughout the 19th century natural history featured prominently in local guide books.

### **Railways**

The Pembroke and Tenby Railway was opened to public traffic in 1863. The link with the main South Wales line was made in 1866, when the Tenby-Whitland line was completed.

### **Artists and Authors**

At the close of the 18th century the French Revolution and wars with France made travel abroad difficult, and people looked closer to home. Over the years Tenby became an increasingly popular destination with wealthy travellers, well-known artists and writers. Amongst these were J.C. Ibbetson, J.M.W.

Turner, Walter Savage Landor,

William Powell Frith, George Eliot

(Mary Ann Evans), Lewis Carroll, Beatrix

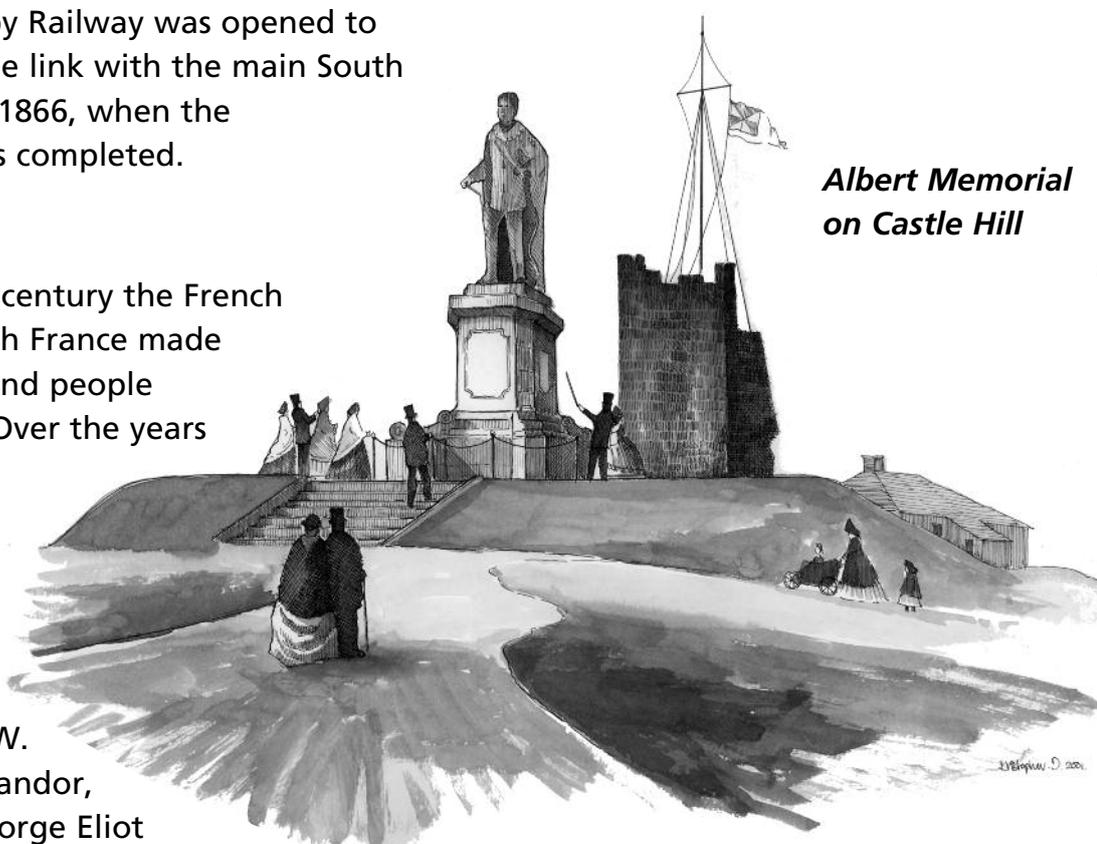
Potter, Roald Dahl, Laurie Lee, Anthony Devas and Dylan Thomas. The book 'Etchings of Tenby' by the artist Charles Norris published in 1812 gives a valuable view of the old town prior to the advent of photography. The internationally famous artists Gwen and Augustus John were brought up in Tenby.

### **Historical Buildings**

Nearly 300 of Tenby's buildings are listed as being of historical and architectural interest.

### **The Walled Towns Friendship Circle**

Founded here in 1991, it now has some 150 members in nearly 30 countries. For further information consult Tenby Museum (founded 1878).



**Albert Memorial  
on Castle Hill**

## **Wildlife and Flowers**

The rock pools and sandy shores are home to a wide variety of molluscs, crabs, shrimps, small fish called gobbies and blennys and sea anemones. Deeper water is home to starfish and larger spider crabs.

Moon jellyfish can sometimes be found washed ashore along with flotsam and jetsam, like mermaid's purse (skate and dogfish egg-cases) whelk egg cases, driftwood and seaweeds. The herring gull, lesser black back gull and cormorant are here all year, and other birds like guillemots and razorbills are summer visitors. Choughs are sometimes seen and grey seals.

Wild flowers are a feature of the cliffs and coastal path. The early purple orchid blooms in sheltered spots. Parts of the dunes along the South Beach have been planted with marram grass and sea buckthorn to lessen erosion. The Tenby Daffodil is an early flowering, deep yellow, dwarf. Historically two sites are mentioned as being the home of the Tenby Daffodil - Holloway Farm, Penally and Knightson, north of Tenby. Some bulbs still grow on these sites and are obviously the original clone.



**Tenby  
Daffodils**

## **Country Code**

### **Respect • Protect • Enjoy**

- Be safe - plan ahead and follow any signs.
- Leave gates and property as you find them.
- Protect plants and animals, and take your litter home.
- Keep dogs under close control.
- Consider other people.