

Something fortified

Some museums, galleries and places of interest have opened up recently, although for how long who knows. This is Tilbury Fort in Essex on the north bank of the Thames which we visited recently.



Tilbury Fort was built 1539/40 on the orders of Henry VIII to protect London from attack from the east coast. Tilbury is directly opposite Gravesend where there was another fort. That is now mostly in ruins around which a very pleasant municipal park has been planted. During the 16th and 17th centuries Tilbury was the garrison town and Gravesend was the preliminary port east of the Port of London. Regular readers will recall my interest in Pocahontas who is buried in the parish church in Gravesend, which is visible from the Fort.

The present fort was enlarged and refortified on the orders of

Charles II in 1670. It is in the shape of a star which made it easy to defend and harder to attack.

Many years ago we visited Baltimore in Maryland and after the aquarium we had time for just one museum which I think was the Star Spangled Banner Flag House. Everybody was very pleasant and the guide was keen to show these English people round. On showing me a picture of Fort McHenry she retained her good manners when I cheerfully exclaimed, Oh, your architect copied our Tilbury Fort! I think it was a safe and standard pattern for all forts until artillery progressed during the 19th century.

Tilbury is where in August 1588 Queen Elizabeth I gave her famous speech to the troops as the Spanish Armada approached the Channel. The expectation was that if the Armada did meet up with the troops of the Duke of Parma in the Netherlands the invasion force would sail up the Thames and land in Essex before advancing on London. 16,000 English soldiers were mustered at Tilbury around the fort, with barges at hand if they needed to cross to Kent. Elizabeth came to Tilbury on her own Royal Barge and after spending the night in Saffron Garden House in nearby Horndon (the house is still there) she rode out of the fort, mounted on a grey horse and wearing a white dress with a silver curiasse to