

## Brigadier-General William Twiss (1744–1827)



### **Introduction**

William Twiss was an important British Army engineer whose work became closely connected with the town of Hythe in Kent. Although little is known about his early life, historians believe he was born in Westminster, London, on 7<sup>th</sup> November 1744. From a young age, he showed an interest in military engineering and began working at the Ordnance Office in the Tower of London in 1760. Three years later, in 1763, he officially joined the Royal Engineers.

### **Early Military Career**

During his military career, Twiss worked on many important defence projects both in Britain and overseas. He served at Gibraltar, helped improve the defences at Portsmouth Dockyard, and travelled to Canada during the American War of Independence in 1776. Over time, he became one of Britain's leading military engineers.

## **The Napoleonic Wars and Coastal Defences**

William Twiss is best remembered for his work during the Napoleonic Wars, when Britain feared invasion by Napoleon Bonaparte and the French Army. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the British government ordered the construction of major coastal defences along the south coast of England. Twiss played an important role in helping design and supervise these military projects.

## **The Royal Military Canal and Hythe**

His strongest connection with Hythe came through the Royal Military Canal. The canal was built between 1804 and 1809 and stretched from Seabrook near Hythe to Rye in Sussex. It was designed as a defensive barrier to slow down any invading French army crossing Romney Marsh. The canal passed directly through Hythe and became one of the most important features of the town during this period.

Twiss was one of the senior Royal Engineers connected with planning and overseeing the canal and the wider defence system. He also helped supervise other military structures along the Kent coast, including Martello Towers, forts, batteries, and defences at Dover and Shorncliffe.

## **Twiss Bridge and Bell Bridge**

Today, William Twiss is still remembered in Hythe through Twiss Road and Twiss Bridge, which crosses the Royal Military Canal. Historical records suggest that the bridge was originally known as Bell Bridge during the nineteenth century. Local references from the time of the Great Storm of 1877 still used the older name. Sometime later, probably in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, the bridge became known as Twiss Bridge in honour of General William Twiss and his contribution to Hythe's military history.

## **Fort Twiss**

Hythe also once had a coastal defence called Fort Twiss. Built near the seafront in 1798, the fort formed part of the protective system defending the town against possible invasion. Although the fort no longer survives, its name reflects the importance of Twiss's work in the area.

## **Family Life**

Away from his military career, William Twiss married Elizabeth Wood in 1775. The couple had one known daughter, Katherine Maria Twiss, who was born in 1776. Very little information survives about his personal life because most historical records focus on his engineering achievements.

## Later Career and Achievements

Throughout his career Twiss continued to rise through the military ranks. He became Governor of the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich in 1795, Major General in 1805, Colonel-Commandant of the Royal Engineers in 1809, and eventually full General in 1825.

## Death and Legacy



The memorial for General William Twiss and his wife, Elizabeth Wood, is located at All Saints' Parish Church in Bingley, Bradford, West Yorkshire. It features a detailed carved marble tablet topped with a Martello Tower. The inscription honors the long career of the Royal Engineer, along with his wife, Elizabeth, who was the daughter of Richard Wood of Hanger Hill, and their only child, Katherine Maria.

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BURIALS in the Parish of <i>Bingley</i> in the County of <i>York</i>				
in the Year one thousand eight hundred and twenty seven				
Name.	Abode.	When buried.	Age.	By whom the Ceremony was performed.
<i>William Twiss</i> <i>General of the</i> <i>Royal Engineers</i> <i>No. 2053</i>	<i>Harden Grange</i>	<i>21. March</i> <sup><i>years</i></sup> <i>82</i>		<i>Ri: Hartley</i> <i>Vicar</i>

After a long life devoted to military engineering and national defence, William Twiss retired and later lived in Bingley, Yorkshire. He died on 14 March 1827 at the age of 82 and was buried at All Saints Church in Bingley.

William Twiss played an important role in protecting Britain during a dangerous period in history. His work on the Royal Military Canal and the coastal defences around Hythe helped strengthen Britain's protection against invasion. Even today, Twiss Bridge, Twiss Road, and the history of the Royal Military Canal serve as lasting reminders of his connection with Hythe. As the town has grown, new developments have continued to honour his legacy, with roads such as Twiss Grove and Twiss Avenue being created off Twiss Road. With further housing and development planned for the area, his name is likely to remain closely associated with Hythe for generations to come.

## **Sources**

*Encyclopaedia Britannica*

*Historic England*

*Royal Engineers Museum*

*Wikipedia: William Twiss*

*Information on the Royal Military Canal and Hythe local history*

*Newspapers*

*Genealogy sites*