

EXTRACT FROM ENGLISH HERITAGE'S RECORD OF SCHEDULED MONUMENTS

MONUMENT: Marrick Priory: a Benedictine nunnery and later parish church with fishponds, mill mound, ironworks, longhouse, trackways and an Iron-Age house platform

PARISH: MARRICK

DISTRICT: RICHMONDSHIRE

COUNTY: NORTH YORKSHIRE

NATIONAL MONUMENT NO: 20523

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE(S): SE06719777

DESCRIPTION OF THE MONUMENT

The monument includes the precinct of the Benedictine nunnery, which became a parish church after the Dissolution, with additional features including two sets of fishponds, the foundations of a windmill, iron smelting works, a medieval longhouse and associated trackways. The monument also contains an Iron-Age house platform, providing evidence of earlier occupation of the site. Marrick Priory is situated at the foot of the northern slopes of Swaledale, adjacent to a northward meander of the River Swale on an old road between Marrick village and Fremlington.

The priory precinct occupies a raised platform, measuring 140m north-south by 120m east-west, which rises above the floodplain of the river. The precinct was bounded by a mortared stone wall which ran along the edge of the platform and which survives in places incorporated into the existing field boundary wall (which is therefore included in the scheduling). According to a 16th century plan of the priory, most of the conventual buildings lay on the southern part of the platform and their foundations are now visible as slight earthworks in fields to the east and to the south-west of Marrick Priory Farm. The churchyard lay to the north of St Andrew's church and continued in use as a cemetery after the Dissolution, while the north-eastern part of the platform is thought to have been the priory orchard. The wall which runs north from the ruined chancel and forms the eastern boundary of the cemetery incorporates mortared medieval masonry and is included in the scheduling. The west range of the priory, depicted on the 16th century plan, lies beneath the 19th century farm buildings to the north-west of the church but the modern barns and slurry-pit to the west of the farmyard entrance have been terraced into the hillside and are thought to have destroyed any remains. Elements of the priory buildings survive as standing structures incorporated into the Grade II* Listed Marrick Priory Farmhouse and the Grade II Listed church. For the most part these are occupied dwellings and thus excluded from the scheduling but three structures are considered suitable for inclusion. The first structure is the Grade II Listed 'Prioress' Chamber', a farm building to the north of the church tower, which is a medieval stone building with mullioned windows that is a part of the west range of the priory surviving to its full height. The second is the ruined chancel, including the adjacent hearse house and footings on the north side; this part of the medieval church was partially demolished

when the church was reduced in size in 1811 but, despite their exposure to the elements, the internal faces of the chancel ruins retain much of their render coat. The third upstanding element included in the scheduling is a medieval stone wall (part of one of the domestic buildings of the nunnery) incorporated into the outhouses east of Marrick Priory Farm; this wall continues the line of the post-medieval garden wall, at first forming the west-facing elevation of the outhouse, then serving as an internal wall.

At Dissolution the priory was one of the wealthiest nunneries in Yorkshire. This wealth was derived from a number of activities and there are a range of features in the vicinity of the priory which pertain to medieval economic activities. Two sets of dried-up fishponds are visible at Marrick, one large rectangular pond, 70m by 40m across and fed by a system of leats, lies beside the river while an integrated pair of ponds is located at the foot of the hill north of the priory; the latter were originally fed by a stream whose flow is now diverted. Also north of the priory and adjacent to the pair of ponds is a mound of iron slag 25m across which is the result of iron smelting at the site. A rectangular stone base 5m by 3m across lies just north of the slag heap; this has been identified as a type of foundation for a windmill which may have powered ore-crushing gear and as such is further evidence for iron working. In the north-west of the area of the scheduling, uphill from the modern shack, the grassed-over foundations of a medieval longhouse are visible. This building measured 65m east-west by 25m north-south and is thought to be a farm house outlying the main precinct. Other irregular earthworks at the foot of the hill demonstrate that the area was quite heavily occupied, although the exact nature of this activity is not understood.

Four old trackways cross the site. One is the old road to Marrick village which runs from the modern access road up the hillside along the bridleway path where it is visible as a terraced way. A second track forms a 12m wide hollow way with an 8m wide bank on its eastern border which follows the foot of the scarp at the eastern edge of the priory precinct leading to the river. The priory lies close to a fording point on the River Swale and a third trackway, on the line of the modern farm track, leads down from the precinct heading towards the river; it crosses a series of earthworks close to the bank which relate to extinct river courses which may be medieval. The fourth trackway follows the field boundary on the western edge of the monument and runs along a 20m wide terrace which falls gently towards the floodplain.

Late Prehistoric or early Romano-British occupation of the area is attested by a clearly defined house-platform of Iron-Age type which is located on the hillside to the north of the bridleway to Marrick. The platform comprises an oval terrace, having a level area 20m by 8m across with a slight bank on its downslope edge, which would have held an Iron-Age hut.

With the exception of those elements whose inclusion is specifically stated above, all buildings are excluded from the scheduling, although the ground beneath them is included. Field walls corresponding to the priory precinct wall and the wall bounding the east of the churchyard, which incorporate mortar bonded stonework, are included in the scheduling but the above-ground elements of all other free-standing walls are excluded. Similarly, any fences, metalled or paved surfaces, the cess pit and its inlet pipe and the aviaries to the west of Priory Farm are excluded from the scheduling while the ground beneath is included.

ASSESSMENT OF IMPORTANCE

A nunnery was a settlement built to sustain a community of religious women. Its main buildings were constructed to provide facilities for worship, accommodation and subsistence. The main elements are the church and domestic

buildings arranged around a cloister. This central enclosure may be accompanied by an outer court and gatehouse, the whole bounded by a precinct wall, earthworks or moat. Outside the enclosure, fishponds, mills, field systems, stock enclosures and barns may occur.

The earliest English nunneries were founded in the seventh century AD but most of these had fallen out of use by the ninth century. A small number of these were later refounded. The tenth century witnessed the foundation of some new houses but the majority of medieval nunneries were established from the late eleventh century onwards. Nunneries were established by most of the major religious orders of the time, including the Benedictines, Cistercians, Augustinians, Franciscans and Dominicans. It is known from documentary sources that at least 153 nunneries existed in England, of which the precise locations of only around 100 sites are known. Few sites have been examined in detail and as a rare and poorly understood medieval monument type all examples exhibiting survival of archaeological remains are worthy of protection.

With its upstanding remains of medieval buildings and clearly visible earthworks, Marrick Priory is one of the best-preserved nunnery sites in the country. The priory is well documented, both historically and by detailed archaeological survey and, as well as the remains of the priory precinct, the monument includes well-preserved features such as fishponds, ironworks, a mill mound and trackways which provide important evidence for the economy of the medieval religious community.

MONUMENT INCLUDED IN THE SCHEDULE ON 08th February 1993