

EXTRACT FROM ENGLISH HERITAGE'S RECORD OF SCHEDULED MONUMENTS

MONUMENT: Ravensworth motte and bailey castle, water defence features, park pale and shrunken medieval village

PARISH: RAVENSWORTH

DISTRICT: RICHMONDSHIRE

COUNTY: NORTH YORKSHIRE

NATIONAL MONUMENT NO: 26937

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE(S): NZ14120758

DESCRIPTION OF THE MONUMENT

The monument includes a motte and bailey castle situated on the end of a low spur surrounded by marshy ground, in eastern Teesdale. The extensive castle remains stand on a low platform separated from the adjacent high ground to the north by a ditch, with earthworks enclosing marshy land around the castle and further earthworks on the slope to the south. The surrounding marsh appears to have been relied upon as the main defensive measure with various moats and channels serving to control the drainage here. Together these water management earthworks helped create a substantial shallow lake west of the castle in the medieval period. Further earthworks are considered to be associated with medieval emparking. Aerial photographs have revealed a further range of buildings on the higher ground to the north of the castle; these are interpreted as part of the shrunken village of Ravensworth.

The castle retains substantial sections of upstanding masonry and earthworks defining the foundations of buried buildings. The castle platform is roughly rectangular in plan, its longer axis north east to south west, the greatest length being 137m and the width up to 67m. A ditch cut across the platform from north west to south east separates the motte which lies in the northern third of the platform from the bailey which lies in the remainder. The platform is steeply scarped on all sides dropping to the flat land which surrounds the site, with a ditch 20m wide at the north angle of the platform separating it from the adjacent higher land. A moat immediately surrounds the castle and has a counterscarp bank extending along its south east side. The castle was approached from the north west where the ditch was spanned by a bridge of which the outer abutment remains as a stony mound. The perimeter of the platform was enclosed by a curtain wall, linking a series of rectangular towers of which the south west, the south east and the gateway remain as ruins. Some of the remaining towers and sections of the curtain wall are identifiable as earthworks. The stub ends of the wall attached to the standing towers indicate the wall to have been 1.07m thick and 5.8m to the top of the parapet. On the motte at the north of the site stands the remains of the gateway tower. It is the most complete part of the castle, the walls standing to virtually full height, with the arch of the adjacent gateway also remaining intact. The tower has three storeys and is 5.2m square internally with walls 1.5m thick. Internal features such as fireplaces and window surrounds and much original architectural detail remains. In the bailey to the south are further sections of standing masonry, the most prominent of which is the belfry tower

which still stands partially to three storeys. It is identified as the tower for a chapel, the remainder of which can be identified as earthworks. Architectural details including a Latin inscription around the uppermost storey of the belfry tower are preserved. The other sections of standing masonry are the north west gable and lower parts of the walls of a long rectangular building 32m by 9.3m, which has been identified as a barn or stable block. The earthwork remains of further ranges of buildings are clearly identifiable throughout the extent of the platform.

The marsh surrounding the castle platform is enclosed by a large bank and ditch extending 250m eastwards along the bottom of the valley, 110m to the south east of the castle, with a lesser bank extending 80m northwards at the west end, 120m to the west of the castle. A further earthwork projects northwards from the southern bank and extends 30m towards the castle. These ditches and embankments created a waterlogged outer enclosure to the west and south of the castle, and would have served to control drainage in the enclosed area.

On the slope to the south west of the castle a broad earthwork extends 170m along the hillside and across a wide gully, where the interior face of the earthwork appears to have been revetted in stone. This earthwork is interpreted as a dam, above it the gully broadens into a level area, its west slope having been scarped to provide material for the dam. A dry valley extends northwards down the slope from the dam to a spring which feeds into the earthworks enclosing the marsh. This dam formed a pond which would have contained a considerable body of water and helped to control the water flow to the castle defences. Further earthworks to the east and west of this gully, extending northwards down the slope to the bank surrounding the marsh, form a discrete enclosed area which is thought to be associated with a hunting park attached to the castle prior to the 14th century. There are further earthworks visible on aerial photographs to the north of the castle which may be part of the medieval village of Ravensworth.

There is no date for the foundation of the castle but it is thought to be the work of the Fitzhugh family in the 11th century. In 1391 Henry, Lord Fitzhugh received licence to enclose 200 acres around the castle as a park, or as an extension to an existing park. The architecture of some of the surviving buildings suggest that the castle itself was rebuilt during this time. A chantry dedicated to St Giles was founded within the castle chapel in 1467. In 1512 the estate was divided and appears to have gone into decline and by 1608, despite being in the hands of the Crown, the castle was being quarried extensively by local people. The medieval park wall can be traced for most of its length but for the most part the existing wall is a later rebuild on the original line. The condition of the castle is described in documents in the mid 16th century and by illustrations in the 18th century.

The fence crossing the school playground and all modern features within the area are excluded from the scheduling although the ground beneath is included.

ASSESSMENT OF IMPORTANCE

Motte and bailey castles are medieval fortifications introduced into Britain by the Normans. They comprised a large conical mound of earth or rubble, the motte, surmounted by a palisade and a stone or timber tower. In a majority of examples an embanked enclosure containing additional buildings, the bailey, adjoined the motte. Motte castles and motte-and-bailey castles acted as garrison forts during offensive military operations, as strongholds, and, in many cases, as aristocratic residences and as centres of local or royal administration. Built in towns, villages and open countryside, motte and bailey castles generally occupied strategic positions dominating their immediate locality and, as a result, are the most visually impressive monuments of the early post-Conquest period surviving in the modern landscape. Over 600 motte castles or motte-and-bailey castles are recorded nationally, with examples known from most regions. As one of a restricted range of

recognised early post-Conquest monuments, they are particularly important for the study of Norman Britain and the development of the feudal system. Although many were occupied for only a short period of time, motte castles continued to be built and occupied from the 11th to the 13th centuries, after which they were superseded by other types of castle.

Although in a ruined state, significant parts of Ravensworth castle have survived, and the original plan and layout is preserved. The standing fabric, particularly the gatehouse and the belfry tower survive reasonably well, and further remains of medieval structures are preserved below ground. Unusually the main defensive feature of the monument was the waterlogged area surrounding the castle which was controlled and managed by a system of embankments and channels which still survive as standing earthworks. The marshy area surrounding the castle will retain important archaeological and environmental evidence relating to the landscape in which the castle was constructed and occupied. The monument additionally includes earthworks relating to the deer park attached to the castle as well as remnants of the medieval village settlement adjacent to the castle. Together the various remains at Ravensworth Castle will contribute to the study of the form and development of castles in the north of England during the medieval period.

SCHEDULING HISTORY

Monument included in the Schedule on 5th August 1933 as:

COUNTY/NUMBER: Yorkshire 190

NAME: Ravensworth castle and three outlying earthworks

Scheduling amended on 1st April 1974 to:

COUNTY/NUMBER: North Yorkshire 190

NAME: Ravensworth castle and three outlying earthworks

Records show that the scheduling was amended on 1st June 1976 to:

COUNTY/NUMBER: North Yorkshire 190

NAME: Ravensworth castle and outlying earthworks

The reference of this monument is now:

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SCHEDULING REVISED ON 02nd August 1995