

## EXTRACT FROM ENGLISH HERITAGE'S RECORD OF SCHEDULED MONUMENTS

MONUMENT: Moated site of Wolsty Castle

PARISH: HOLME LOW

DISTRICT: ALLERDALE

COUNTY: CUMBRIA

NATIONAL MONUMENT NO: 27666

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE(S): NY10495060

### DESCRIPTION OF THE MONUMENT

The monument includes the moated site of Wolsty Castle. It is located on flat land close to the present coastline and approximately 7km west of Holme Cultram Abbey, and includes an island or platform surrounded by a dry moat which in turn is flanked by traces of an outer bank. The island measures c.40m square and contains many earthworks and undulations which indicate a combination of structural foundations of the medieval castle and stone robbing trenches. There are two upstanding blocks of mortared masonry, one on the north and one on the south side of the island and each about 1.5m high, which show that the castle's curtain wall was over 2m thick. The surrounding moat measures 20m-30m wide by 1.5m deep and is flanked by an outer bank 5m-10m wide and up to 0.4m high. There are faint traces of an outlet channel at the moat's south east corner.

Wolsty Castle was constructed during the first half of the 14th century as protection for Holme Cultram Abbey which had been pillaged by the Scots under Alexander II in 1216 and Robert Bruce in 1322. The castle received a licence to crenellate in 1348 and was occupied by the Chamber family, one of whom, Robert, was the Abbot of Holm Cultram. By 1572 the castle was in decay and documentary sources indicate that the hall, chamber, the evidence house, the kitchen, the peat house, byre and stable were ruinous. Repair work was undertaken during the 1630s but by the latter half of the 17th century the castle had been demolished and its stone taken for reuse in Carlisle. A telegraph pole, and a modern field boundary on the monument's west side are excluded from the scheduling but the ground beneath these features is included.

### ASSESSMENT OF IMPORTANCE

Around 6,000 moated sites are known in England. They consist of wide ditches, often or seasonally water-filled, partly or completely enclosing one or more islands of dry ground on which stood domestic or religious buildings. In some cases the islands were used for horticulture. The majority of moated sites served as prestigious aristocratic and seigneurial residences with the provision of a moat intended as a status symbol rather than a practical military defence. The peak period during which moated sites were built was between about 1250 and 1350 and by far the greatest concentration lies in central and eastern parts of England. However, moated sites were built throughout the medieval period, are widely scattered throughout England and

exhibit a high level of diversity in their forms and sizes. They form a significant class of medieval monument and are important for the understanding of the distribution of wealth and status in the countryside. Many examples provide conditions favourable to the survival of organic remains.

Despite some stone robbing, the moated site of Wolsty Castle survives reasonably well and remains unencumbered by modern development. It is a rare example in Cumbria of a moated castle constructed for the purpose of protecting a nearby abbey, in this case Holme Cultram. The site will contain buried remains of the medieval castle which is known from documentary sources to have been occupied from the early 14th to the mid-17th centuries.

#### SCHEDULING HISTORY

Monument included in the Schedule on 1st August 1961 as:

COUNTY/NUMBER: Cumberland 77

NAME: Wolsty Castle, Holme Low

Scheduling amended on 1st April 1974 to:

COUNTY/NUMBER: Cumbria 348

NAME: Wolsty Castle, Holme Low

The reference of this monument is now:

NATIONAL MONUMENT NUMBER: 27666

NAME: Moated site of Wolsty Castle

SCHEDULING REVISED ON 31st August 1995