

EXTRACT FROM ENGLISH HERITAGE'S RECORD OF SCHEDULED MONUMENTS

MONUMENT: Whitwick Castle

PARISH: NORTH WEST LEICESTERSHIRE

DISTRICT: NORTH WEST LEICESTERSHIRE

COUNTY: LEICESTERSHIRE

NATIONAL MONUMENT NO: 17070

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE(S): SK43591618

DESCRIPTION OF THE MONUMENT

The motte and bailey castle is situated on an oval-shaped natural hill at the junction of two streams within the small north-west Leicestershire town of Whitwick.

The bailey of the castle is formed by the natural rise of the hill and occupies an area measuring approximately 100m x 35m, rising 7-8m from the surrounding land. The scarp is steepest on the eastern side where the hill falls away to the Grace Dieu Brook. The motte is a small circular mound situated in the centre of the hill rising to about 2m in height.

The castle was held by the Earl of Leicester in the middle of the 12th century and had come into royal hands by 1204 when King John installed William de Senevill as keeper. By the 14th century it was in the hands of the Earls of Lancaster when Henry Beaumont had licence to crenellate in 1321 and in 1331 he complained that the castle had been broken into. It thereafter fell into disrepair and by 1427 was described as 'old and ruinous in which there are no buildings and worth nothing yearly'. At the end of the 18th century it was said that the foundations of the castle could still be seen and a wall was still visible on the north side in 1893.

A row of cottages situated on the north side of the site and an approach drive to them are excluded from the scheduling, although the ground beneath them is included.

ASSESSMENT OF IMPORTANCE

Motte 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 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 and motte-and-bailey castles are recorded nationally, with examples known from most regions. Some 100-150 examples do not have baileys and are classified as motte castles. 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.

The castle at Whitwick survives in good condition and will retain archaeological evidence of buildings within the interior. Royal associations and important documentary information make the site an above average example of its type in Leicestershire.

SCHEDULING HISTORY

Monument included in the Schedule on 26th September 1950 as:

COUNTY/NUMBER: Leicestershire 36

NAME: Whitwick Castle mound

The reference of this monument is now:

NATIONAL MONUMENT NUMBER: 17070

NAME: Whitwick Castle

SCHEDULING AFFIRMED ON 10th September 1992