

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

MONUMENT: Someries Castle: a medieval magnate's residence and formal garden remains

PARISH: HYDE

DISTRICT: SOUTH BEDFORDSHIRE

COUNTY: BEDFORDSHIRE

NATIONAL MONUMENT NO: 20458

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE(S): TL11922013

### DESCRIPTION OF THE MONUMENT

The monument includes both upstanding and buried foundations of the late medieval magnate's residence known as Someries Castle and the adjacent garden earthworks to the south west. The monument lies beside an old road between Luton and Kimpton and is situated on a plateau of the Chilterns to the east of the Lea Valley. The upstanding remains include the gatehouse and chapel forming the north west wing of the magnate's residence. Although the roof has gone, the walls survive almost to full height, an estimated 10m. The gatehouse is built in imitation of a castle gateway, with two semi-octagonal bastions on either side of the entrance passage which passes through the building and would have given access to an enclosed courtyard. The rectangular chapel, measuring 16m long by 5m wide, extends to the north east of the gatehouse and has a large perpendicular window opening in the gable. On the outer face of the south east wall of the chapel may be seen the abutment of the north east wing which is now demolished to ground level. The area occupied by the main block of the residence is defined by a raised platform containing low, irregular earthworks to the north east of the garden earthworks. Traces of a substantial brick wall are visible in the north east corner of the site.

The formal garden remains are represented by a rectangular earthwork, measuring a maximum of 100m long by 80m wide. A square mound, 40m by 40m, is placed centrally within the earthwork. There is a slight bank forming a border around the perimeter of the mound which is quartered by two, 2.5m wide, raised walkways indicating the positions of ornamental flowerbeds. Both the borders and the paths are less than 0.2m high. The mound stands about 1m above the surrounding broad, level area which extends beyond the base some 18m to the north east and south west, and about 8m to the north west and south east. This flat area is bounded by a flat-topped bank averaging about 6m wide, though both the corners and the north east sides are slightly wider. From the inside, the bank stands about 1m high but externally it rises to about 1.5m above the bottom of a surrounding ditch. This ditch is generally about 4m wide except along the north eastern arm where it is up to 8m wide. A further low bank defines the outside edge of the ditch. It is about 3m wide and survives to a height of 0.3m to 0.4m, except on the north west side where it has been incorporated into a later boundary. The circuit of the surrounding banks is broken on the north west side by a 10m wide ramped causeway leading into the centre of the garden. The earthworks are at their largest and most impressive

on the north east side where they face onto the magnate's residence. A small excavation was undertaken across the earthworks in 1969. Although they did not proceed much below the topsoil, the investigations revealed that the bottom of the ditch was lined with a horizontal bed of stones. Pottery of the 13th to 16th centuries and small amounts of building material were recovered.

The name Someries Castle is derived from William de Someries, whose residence stood on the site in the 13th century. The exact location of his manor house is not known but in the 16th century the antiquarian John Leland noted that the remains of an 'old palace' could be seen. The garden earthworks, whilst bearing a superficial resemblance to a medieval moat, are firmly in the tradition of the formal gardens of the 16th and 17th centuries. The adjacent magnate's residence was built by Lord Wenlock, who acquired the Someries estate in the 1430s. The mansion is thus thought to be one of the earliest brick buildings in England. After Wenlock's death, the estate passed to Thomas Rotherham, Bishop of Lincoln and later Archbishop of York; King James I stayed here with one of Rotherham's descendants in 1605. The palace was never completed, although an inventory of 1606 lists 20 rooms in use. Much of the building was pulled down in 1742 and subsequent 18th-century prints show the ruins largely in their present condition.

The following items are excluded from the scheduling: the modern sheds overlying the magnate's residence, fences at the sides of both the garden earthworks and the magnate's residence, and the walls and railings around the standing ruins, although the ground beneath all these features is included.

## ASSESSMENT OF IMPORTANCE

Magnates' residences are high status dwellings of domestic rather than military character. They date from the Norman Conquest (in some cases forming a continuation of a Saxon tradition) and throughout the rest of the medieval period. Individual residences were in use for varying lengths of time; some continued in use into the post-medieval period. Such dwellings were the houses or palaces of royalty, bishops and the highest ranks of the nobility, usually those associated with the monarch. They functioned as luxury residences for the elite and their large retinues, and provided an opportunity to display wealth in the form of elaborate architecture and lavish decoration. As such, these palaces formed an impressive setting for audiences with royalty, foreign ambassadors and other lords and bishops.

Magnates' residences are located in both rural and urban areas. Bishops' residences are usually in close association with cathedrals, and all residences tend to be located close to good communication routes. Unless constrained by pre-existing structures, magnates' residences comprised an elaborate series of buildings, usually of stone, that in general included a great hall, chambers, kitchens, service rooms, lodgings, a chapel and a gatehouse, arranged around a single or double courtyard. As a consequence of the status of these sites, historic documentation is often prolific, and can be of great value for establishing the date of construction and subsequent alterations to the buildings, and for investigating the range of activities for which the site was a focus.

Magnates' residences are widely dispersed throughout England reflecting the mobility of royalty and the upper echelons of the nobility. There is a concentration of sites which reflects the growing importance of London as a political centre, and the majority of magnates' residences tend to be located in the south of the country. Despite their wide distribution, magnates' residences are a relatively rare form of monument due to their special social status. At present only around 236 examples have been identified of which 150 are ecclesiastical palaces and 86 are connected with royalty. Magnates' residences generally provide an emotive and evocative link with the past,

especially through their connections with famous historical figures, and can provide a valuable educational resource, both with respect to the organisation and display of political power, and wider aspects of medieval and post-medieval society such as the development of towns and industries and the distribution of dependent agricultural holdings. Examples with surviving archaeological potential are considered to be of national importance.

Although only the gatehouse and the chapel at Someries Castle survive as upstanding structures, the positions of the principal range and inner courtyard are indicated through joints and markings in the fabric of the walls. A substantial brick footing lies towards the north east corner of the site indicating the survival of buried foundations. Documentary evidence indicates a predecessor to the known structures which may also exist in the form of buried archaeological features. The surviving remains provide important evidence for the interpretation of similar buildings for which only the ground plan is known. Someries Castle is one of the earliest surviving brick buildings of this type in England and is therefore of great significance for the study of the development of construction techniques in brick. The importance of the monument is further enhanced by its accessibility to the public.

Formal gardens are usually found in direct association with the dwellings of high-ranking individuals in society and are a further indication of the status of such buildings. Early gardens tend to follow a rigid design and were often elaborate earthworks, with gravel paths and raised borders.

The formal garden at Someries Castle is a well preserved example with a central raised mound, traces of paths and flowerbeds and surrounding terraces. The presence of the adjacent remains of the magnate's residence enhances the importance of the gardens by allowing the two related sites to be studied in conjunction with each other.

#### SCHEDULING HISTORY

Records show that the monument was originally scheduled on 26th June 1924 as:

COUNTY/NUMBER: Bedfordshire 6

NAME: Someries Castle, Stopsley

Monument's inclusion in the Schedule was confirmed on 9th October 1981.

Monument included as:

COUNTY/NUMBER: Bedfordshire 6

NAME: Someries Castle

The reference of this monument is now:

NATIONAL MONUMENT NUMBER: 20458

NAME: Someries Castle: a medieval magnate's residence and formal garden remains

SCHEDULING REVISED ON 06th September 1995