

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

MONUMENT: Castle Hill motte

PARISH: AUDLEY RURAL

DISTRICT: NEWCASTLE UNDER LYME

COUNTY: STAFFORDSHIRE

NATIONAL MONUMENT NO: 21538

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE(S): SJ79935102

### DESCRIPTION OF THE MONUMENT

Castle Hill motte is situated on a natural plateau on the eastern outskirts of the village of Ashley. The plateau was adapted during the 12th century and the ground surface built up slightly in order to construct a motte castle on its summit. The monument includes the mound of Castle Hill motte and the ditch at its eastern and northern edges.

The sloping sides of the plateau form the defences of the motte on its western and southern edges and the eastern and northern defences have been strengthened by the construction of a ditch. The ditch has been mostly infilled and measures up to 10m wide with an average depth of 0.5m. The line of the ditch has been partly obscured and damaged by ploughing at the northern edge of the monument.

The flat-topped mound has a diameter of approximately 12m across its summit. It measures approximately 2.5m high on its northern side and up to 9m high on its southern side. An excavation across the top of the motte in 1911 exposed a 5m length of masonry walling and a narrow stone-lined channel. These features were built on a north-south alignment. The stone foundations of an angle of walling were located at the eastern edge of the motte which projected slightly beyond the edge of the mound. A timber post, fragments of 15th, 17th and 18th century pottery and a late 13th century silver coin were found during the excavation.

Castle Hill motte is considered to have been the original seat of the Audley family prior to their move to Heighley Castle in the first quarter of the 13th century. A partition of lands belonging to the Audley family in 1274-5 refers to the castle in Audley. Documentary references to Castle Hill motte in 1272-3 and 1275 suggest that the site was not immediately abandoned after the construction of Heighley.

The flight of concrete steps, which provide access onto the summit of the mound, the garden furniture and the fence posts on the top of the motte and the surface and stone steps of the footpath which follows the lower contours of the southern edge of the mound are excluded from the scheduling, but the ground beneath these features is included. Also excluded are the stone retaining walls which cut into the southern slope of the mound, but the ground beneath these features 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.

Castle Hill motte survives well and is a good example of this type of monument. Small-scale excavation at the site has provided evidence that the motte retains important information concerning the construction of the castle and the activities of its inhabitants. The site is also of importance because its short period of occupancy and its early abandonment in the 13th century will have ensured that these early deposits have not been greatly disturbed by later buildings on the site.

#### SCHEDULING HISTORY

Monument included in the Schedule on 14th January 1974 as:

COUNTY/NUMBER: Staffordshire 234

NAME: Motte and bailey at Castle Hill

The reference of this monument is now:

NATIONAL MONUMENT NUMBER: 21538

NAME: Castle Hill motte

SCHEDULING REVISED ON 21st January 1994