

EXTRACT FROM ENGLISH HERITAGE'S RECORD OF SCHEDULED MONUMENTS

MONUMENT: Gisborough Priory Augustinian monastery: late Saxon settlement, cemetery, monastic precinct and dovecote

PARISH: GUISBOROUGH

DISTRICT: REDCAR AND CLEVELAND

COUNTY: REDCAR AND CLEVELAND

NATIONAL MONUMENT NO: 23223

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE(S): NZ61671606

DESCRIPTION OF THE MONUMENT

The monument includes the standing remains and part of the precinct of the Augustinian priory of St Mary at Guisborough, an early 16th century dovecote and the sites of the late Saxon settlement and early Norman cemetery that preceded the monastery. Further monastic remains exist to the south of the area but have not been included in the scheduling as their extent and state of survival are not sufficiently understood.

Partial excavations have been carried out at Gisborough Priory in both the church and the west cloister range. The earliest took place in the ruins of the church in 1865 and 1867, under the supervision of Captain Thomas Chaloner and William Downing Bruce. Between 1947 and 1954, the west range was cleared as far as the most recent remains by Roy Gilyard-Beer for the Ministry of Works, and, more recently, in 1985 and 1986, the nave and west end of the church were partially re-excavated by Cleveland County Archaeological Section prior to consolidation work. In addition, the latter carried out geophysical surveys of the areas west and east of the west cloister range, where their findings indicate the widespread existence of further monastic buildings surviving as buried features within parts of the precinct that no longer include standing remains.

The earliest features, located during the most recent excavations in the church, are of a late Saxon settlement and an early Norman cemetery. The former is indicated by a number of postholes representing the site of a timber-framed building or boundary wall roughly aligned with modern Church Street. These were associated with fragments of late Saxon pottery, including a cooking vessel typical of the period, and an eighth century coin known as a sceat. Further remains of the settlement will survive in the unexcavated areas of the later monastery. This phase of Saxon occupation was followed by a period during which soil built up over the deserted remains of the settlement and was subsequently ploughed, as indicated by the remains of ridge and furrow found beneath the nave of the earliest stone church. This agricultural phase can be no later than the priory's foundation in 1119 and is either slightly earlier than or broadly contemporary with a number of burials, also found underlying the early church at its north west corner. These burials indicate the existence of an early 12th century cemetery north of the church, roughly aligned on the current parish church which lies immediately north of the priory. Also found, beneath the south aisle of the priory church, were the stone foundations of an insubstantial early Norman building which included

three burials against its north wall. One possibility is that the building was a temporary church built for the newly founded priory.

As is usual, at Gisborough the priory church formed the north range of an open square of buildings known as the cloister. Excluding the possible temporary structure, there were three successive churches. The first, a building in the Romanesque style constructed prior to 1180, was aisled and included an axial tower at the west end. A door opened northward, away from the cloister, indicating that the church was also used by a secular congregation who were, perhaps, patrons of the monastery. Several graves were set into the floor of the south aisle and against the north wall. During the second half of the 12th century, the Romanesque church was demolished down to the first ashlar course and the Norman floors were removed to level the surface. New foundations were laid and a piped water-supply installed. The water came along lead pipes from the cloister area, running under the south wall and aisle of the church, and was designed to supply buildings or standpipes to the north and west of the church. The rebuilding of the church continued during the 13th century and included the casting of a copper-alloy bell, indicated by the survival of metallurgical debris in a pit within the church.

Reconstruction was interrupted, however, by the fire of 1289, recorded by Walter de Hemingburgh who was a sub-prior of the monastery in the early 14th century. He states that, as a result of the fire, the whole church, apart from the west front, was replaced during the 14th century. However, the devastating effect of the fire may have been exaggerated since much of the excavated stonework of the latest church is stylistically datable to no later than the mid-13th century and is typical of the early Gothic architecture of the north of England. Moreover, although in the south aisle, 13th century paving stones and grave slabs were found shattered by fallen masonry, the lack of burnt material in the graves implies that the collapse was not due to fire. Certainly, fire-damage has been noted during archaeological work, particularly in the north west area of the church where it was not cleared away, but the question must remain open as to the impetus for the 14th century rebuild. Possibly the damage was far greater in the east end of the church, which has not been excavated in recent years. Here the east wall of the presbytery stands, surviving to its full height of 29.6m and largely intact but for the complex tracery of its great east window. This was the earliest part of the post-1289 church and is the only section left standing. While the east end was being rebuilt, the west end of the church entered a period of non-ecclesiastical use associated with the installation of a new piped water-supply fed by a cistern which was filled from a well in the central aisle. The precise nature of this temporary phase is not yet fully understood.

South of the church lay the remaining three cloister ranges of which only the west range has been excavated. Its standing remains date to the later 13th century, with 15th century cross walls, and include a vaulted ground floor or undercroft which would have been used for cellarage. Between the undercroft and the church was a narrow room which served as the main entrance into the cloister while, on the first floor, would have been the quarters of the monastery's conversi or lay-brothers. The unexcavated south range would have included the canons' frater or refectory and the priory kitchens, while the east range would have included the dormer or dormitory and the chapter house. A wide range of ancillary buildings stood outside the cloister and would have included, for example, an infirmary, a brewhouse and bakehouse, workshops and barns dating to all phases of the priory's use.

Records indicate the existence of two gatehouses, one of which survives as a ruined feature in the precinct wall north west of the church. Both gatehouses contained lodgings which, in the early 16th century, were occupied by two knights of the Bulmer family and may have been the 'guesthouses' recorded in documents of c.1600, though these may have been separate buildings. The surviving gatehouse to the north dates to the late 12th century and includes a single large, rounded arch leading from the town and two arches opening onto

the outer court of the priory, one of which was for pedestrians. In the west wall is the shaft for the garderobe or privy that served the lodgings above the gate. The same group of documents that mention the guesthouses also note that the priory church had a steeple and that there was 'a most pompous house' for the prior. The remains of these too will survive as buried features. Also in the outer court, in an area rich in buried foundations, is a dovecote. This building was constructed by the priory at the beginning of the 16th century and is a Grade I Listed Building.

The priory was founded by Robert de Brus as part of the early 12th century religious revival in the north of England. Walter de Hemingburgh states that the date of foundation was 1129. However, this was the date of the deed of confirmation and the actual foundation was between five and ten years earlier, during the pontificate of Pope Calixtus II. The priory was richly endowed from the onset and continued to be supported by the benefactions not only of large landowners but also of relatively humble people. During the 12th century it had a reputation for strict observance and was the final home of St Malachy. By the end of the 13th century, however, visitors noted a degree of laxity amongst the canons and poor accounting indicates that the bailiffs employed to manage the priory's outlying estates were, in fact, lining their own pockets. The fire of 1289 also had a serious financial effect, as did the Scottish Wars of the 14th century when the priory became a refuge for canons driven from the monasteries at Brinkburn, Jedburgh and Hexham. In 1328 the priory claimed to be unable to pay the tenth voted by the Northern Convocation and was petitioning to be relieved of certain financial burdens. Its finances must have recovered, however, because in 1344 it was granted permission to crenellate (fortify), and by the time of the 1535 Act of Suppression affecting lesser monasteries it was found to be the fourth richest monastery in Yorkshire. At about this time, the king's sympathiser Robert Pursglove was made prior, replacing James Cockerell who, like many people in the north, was opposed to the religious changes brought about by Henry VIII and was eventually executed after being implicated in the Pilgrimage of Grace. In 1538 Pursglove was made Suffragan Bishop of Hull and the priory was formally dissolved on 8th April 1540. Subsequently, there was a scheme to found a college of secular canons in the former priory, but this came to nothing. In 1550, the site and buildings were sold to Sir Thomas Chaloner and are now part of the estate of Gisborough Hall. The gatehouse and priory ruins are Grade I Listed Buildings while the precinct walls are Grade II. The monument has been in State care since 1932.

A number of features within the area are excluded from the scheduling; these are all English Heritage fixtures and fittings including the ticket office, the surface of all paths, and all modern walling and fencing, but the ground beneath all these features is included.

ASSESSMENT OF IMPORTANCE

From the time of St Augustine's mission to re-establish Christianity in AD 597 to the reign of Henry VIII, monasticism formed an important facet of both religious and secular life in the British Isles. Settlements of religious communities, including monasteries, were built to house communities of monks, canons (priests), and sometimes lay-brothers, living a common life of religious observance under some form of systematic discipline. It is estimated from documentary evidence that over 700 monasteries were founded in England. These ranged in size from major communities with several hundred members to tiny establishments with a handful of brethren. They belonged to a wide variety of different religious orders, each with its own philosophy. As a result, they vary considerably in the detail of their appearance and layout, although all possess the basic elements of church, domestic accommodation for the community, and work buildings. Monasteries were inextricably woven into the fabric of medieval society, acting not only as centres of worship, learning, and charity, but also, because of the vast landholdings of some

orders, as centres of immense wealth and political influence. They were established in all parts of England, some in towns and others in the remotest of areas. Many monasteries acted as the foci of wide networks including parish churches, almshouses, hospitals, farming estates and tenant villages. Some 225 of these religious houses belonged to the order of St Augustine. The Augustinians were not monks in the strict sense, but rather communities of canons - or priests - living under the rule of St Augustine. In England they came to be known as 'black canons' because of their dark coloured robes and to distinguish them from the Cistercians who wore light clothing. From the 12th century onwards, they undertook much valuable work in the parishes, running almshouses, schools and hospitals as well as maintaining and preaching in parish churches. It was from the churches that they derived much of their revenue. The Augustinians made a major contribution to many facets of medieval life and all of their monasteries which exhibit significant surviving archaeological remains are worthy of protection.

Gisborough Priory was one of the first 20 houses of canons regular to be founded in this country and was one of the earliest in the north. It was the largest northern foundation and played an important role in the first wave of medieval monastic settlement, and it remained one of the wealthiest monasteries right up to the Dissolution. Although it has few standing remains, excavation and geophysical survey have shown that a wide variety of monastic buildings and features survive extensively throughout the open areas of its precinct. Moreover, the surviving east end of the priory church is extremely well-preserved and is one of the finest examples of early Gothic architecture in existence. The east window is one of the largest of its date in the country. Of equal importance is the large body of documentary evidence associated with the priory.

SCHEDULING HISTORY

Records show monument included was in the Schedule on 8th February 1915 as:

COUNTY/NUMBER: Yorkshire 6

NAME: Guisborough Abbey

Monument placed in Guardianship on 27th January 1932 as:

COUNTY/NUMBER: Yorkshire 6

NAME: Gisborough Priory

Scheduling amended on 1st April 1974 to:

COUNTY/NUMBER : Cleveland 19

NAME: Gisborough Priory

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

Monument included as:

COUNTY/NUMBER: Cleveland 19

NAME: Gisborough Priory

The reference of this monument is now:

NATIONAL MONUMENT NUMBER: 23223

NAME: Gisborough Priory Augustinian monastery: late Saxon settlement, cemetery, monastic precinct and dovecote

SCHEDULING REVISED ON 03rd May 1994