

EXTRACT FROM ENGLISH HERITAGE'S RECORD OF SCHEDULED MONUMENTS

MONUMENT: Strickland's Pele Tower and Penrith Castle

PARISH: EDEN

DISTRICT: EDEN

COUNTY: CUMBRIA

NATIONAL MONUMENT NO: 23649

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE(S): NY51262992

DESCRIPTION OF THE MONUMENT

The monument includes the sandstone ruins of the 15th century Penrith castle together with a 14th century pele tower built by Bishop Strickland. It is located on a low natural eminence to the west of the town centre. The earliest feature of the site is the square pele tower, known as Strickland's or Bishop's Tower. This has external dimensions of 10m by 8.8m with walls 2.3m thick and over 1m high. There is a slit window in its north western side and a doorway in its south western side giving access into a substantial yard measuring approximately 36m square internally which is enclosed by a high barmkin or curtain wall. This wall still stands virtually to its full height on the south east and much of the south west sides but is considerably reduced in height elsewhere. The yard would have contained timber buildings associated with the pele tower. There are two entrances through the curtain; one adjacent to the pele tower, the other through the north western side. The buildings of the later castle were constructed within this yard and against the curtain wall, thereby creating an inner courtyard, and survive as low stone walls. These internal buildings included a great chamber on the north eastern side; a chapel, private chamber and great hall on the south eastern side; kitchens on the south western side; and the White Tower at the western corner. There is a well adjacent to the southern corner of the courtyard. The castle was later extended beyond the north west wall of the barmkin and there are foundations of a garderobe turret, guard chambers flanking a more elaborate entrance, and remains of the Red Tower at the northern corner. Surrounding the castle on all sides except the north west where it has been lost, is a dry moat up to 15m wide and 6m deep. The upcast from the moat forms an adjacent outer bank measuring a maximum of 9m wide by 2m high on the north east and south east sides. There are foundations of a bridge abutment and later gatetower giving access across the moat's north eastern arm.

The earliest documentary evidence for the site dates to 1397 when William Strickland obtained a licence to strengthen and crenellate his pele tower in response to the frequent Scottish raids into northern England during the 14th and 15th centuries. Two years later a further licence was granted to build the barmkin. In the early 15th century Richard II gave the town and manor of Penrith to Ralph Nevill, Earl of Westmorland, and the new owner added the Red Tower, began construction of the internal buildings in stone and enhanced the defensive nature of the two gateways. In 1471 Richard, Duke of Gloucester, later Richard III, continued the internal building and added a substantial

outer gateway on the north western side, enlarging the structure into a royal castle. The moat is thought to have been added towards the end of the 15th century and was crossed originally by a bridge, possibly a drawbridge, which was later replaced by a gateway. By the mid-16th century the castle had begun to fall into disrepair and was being used as a source of building material. A survey of the remains in 1565 indicated that only Strickland's or Bishop's Tower, a chamber between the tower and kitchen, the Red Tower, two stables, a brewhouse and a bakehouse were habitable. By 1580 the castle was described as 'greatly decayed'. In 1648 Major General Lambert made his headquarters in the castle for a month when his troops consisting of 3000 horse and foot soldiers were quartered in the town during the Civil War. The castle was dismantled soon after. It is now in the guardianship of the Secretary of State and is a Listed Building grade I.

All walls, railings, paths, steps, information boards, and English Heritage fixtures and fittings are excluded from the scheduling, as is the modern timber bridge and its footings that give access to the castle but the ground beneath all these features is included.

ASSESSMENT OF IMPORTANCE

Pele towers are a type of defensible house particularly characteristic of the borderlands of England and Scotland. Many lie adjacent to river valleys and on ground between 200m-350m OD and tend to cluster in groups, reflecting defensive considerations and the distribution of farmsteads. They are characterised by their thick drystone walls, external staircases, and the presence of a barmkin (ie a stout wooden palisade or stone wall) enclosing a yard which could be used as a place of refuge by people and livestock from nearby farms and villages. They were being constructed and used from the mid-14th century until around 1600. Characteristically pele towers are oblong in plan with external dimensions of about 14m by 7m, and are between two to four storeys in height and gable ended. Walls are generally thick and consist of large irregular stone blocks or rubble. Thatch and heather was a common roof covering. Where a below-ground basement exists it tends to be vaulted with a small access at the centre of the vault. The ground floor often contained a doorway and slit windows and was generally used as a store or stable. The first floor is generally served by a single entrance and was reached by an external stair. There was usually a fireplace and windows tend to be small or slits. Internally pele towers contained a single room on each floor. The need for such secure buildings relates to the unsettled and warlike conditions which prevailed in the Borders throughout much of the medieval period. Around 100 pele towers are recorded to have existed between 1500 and 1625, however, this may be a small fraction of the original number constructed. Some became incorporated into later houses, while at others their defensive function was enhanced and improved as they were incorporated into later castles.

Penrith Castle is a good example of a medieval castle which developed within the barmkin or curtain wall of an earlier pele tower. Its ruins are well preserved and it provides an important insight into the types of fortification required in the unsettled northern borderlands during the medieval period.

SCHEDULING HISTORY

Monument placed in Guardianship on 19th December 1913 as:
COUNTY/NUMBER: Cumberland 3
NAME: Penrith Castle

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

COUNTY/NUMBER: Cumbria 363

NAME: Penrith Castle

The reference of this monument is now:

NATIONAL MONUMENT NUMBER: 23649

NAME: Strickland's Pele Tower and Penrith Castle

SCHEDULING REVISED ON 11th July 1994