

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

MONUMENT: Mere Castle

PARISH: MERE

DISTRICT: SALISBURY

COUNTY: WILTSHIRE

NATIONAL MONUMENT NO: 26870

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE(S): ST80973254

### DESCRIPTION OF THE MONUMENT

The monument includes the remains of Mere Castle, an enclosure castle, the mound of which was formed by alteration of the eastern end of a chalk ridge known as Long Hill. The top of this part of the hill was levelled to create a building platform and a deep ditch, approximately 5m deep, was dug to separate the castle from the western part of the ridge. The ditch includes a 2m wide causeway linking the castle to the western part of the ridge. In addition, the ditch, which in part forms a natural amphitheatre known as the Bull Ring, has a broad bank on its western side. A further ditch, 1.5m deep, is located on the eastern slope of the hill. Although the castle now survives as an earthwork, limited excavations carried out in 1887 by T H Baker and the Rev E G Wyld revealed a rectangular structure approximately 118m by 31m on the summit of the hill, which had two circular towers on each side and rectangular corner towers.

Mere Castle was built by Richard, Earl of Cornwall, in 1253. It originally included six towers, a hall, inner and outer gates, a well and a chapel. It was repaired in 1300 after which it fell into decay and was finally demolished between 1780 and 1790, the materials from the castle being sold for building purposes.

Fragmentary terraces on the lower slopes of the hill below the castle on its eastern side are of uncertain date and function and are not included in the scheduling.

All fence posts, benches, the flag pole, war memorial, steps and plinths supporting information panels are excluded from the scheduling, although the ground beneath them is included.

### ASSESSMENT OF IMPORTANCE

An enclosure castle is a defended residence or stronghold, built mainly of stone, in which the principal or sole defence comprises the walls and towers bounding the site. Some form of keep may have stood within the enclosure but this was not significant in defensive terms and served mainly to provide accommodation. Larger sites might have more than one line of walling and there are normally mural towers and gatehouses. Outside the walls a ditch, either waterfilled or dry, crossed by bridges may be found. The first enclosure castles were constructed at the time of the Norman Conquest. However, they developed considerably in form during the 12th century when defensive experience gained during the Crusades was applied to their design. The

majority of examples were constructed in the 13th century although a few were built as late as the 14th century. Some represent reconstructions of earlier medieval earthwork castles of the motte and bailey type, although others were new creations. They provided strongly defended residences for the king or leading families and occur in both urban and rural situations. Enclosure castles are widely dispersed throughout England, with a slight concentration in Kent and Sussex supporting a vulnerable coast, and a strong concentration along the Welsh border where some of the best examples were built under Edward I. They are rare nationally with only 126 recorded examples. Considerable diversity of form is exhibited with no two examples being exactly alike. With other castle types, they are major medieval monument types which, belonging to the highest levels of society, frequently acted as major administrative centres and formed the foci for developing settlement patterns. Castles generally provide an emotive and evocative link to the past and can provide a valuable educational resource, both with respect to medieval warfare and defence and with respect to wider aspects of medieval society. All examples retaining significant remains of medieval date are considered to be nationally important.

Mere Castle is a prominent feature in the landscape, overlooking the town of Mere. Limited excavations have provided information about the nature of the castle and the surviving remains will contain archaeological deposits providing information about its use and economy. The Castle is open to the public.

#### SCHEDULING HISTORY

Monument included in the Schedule on 19th April 1956 as:

COUNTY/NUMBER: Wiltshire 217

NAME: Mere Castle

The reference of this monument is now:

NATIONAL MONUMENT NUMBER: 26870

NAME: Mere Castle

SCHEDULING REVISED ON 07th July 1999