

EXTRACT FROM ENGLISH HERITAGE'S RECORD OF SCHEDULED MONUMENTS

MONUMENT: Tower keep castle at Sutton Valence

PARISH: SUTTON VALENCE

DISTRICT: MAIDSTONE

COUNTY: KENT

NATIONAL MONUMENT NO: 27017

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE(S): TQ81554910

DESCRIPTION OF THE MONUMENT

The monument includes a tower keep castle which survives as a ruin, Listed at Grade II, within an area of associated earthworks and buried remains, situated on the southernmost spur of the Chart Hills, on the eastern edge of the village of Sutton Valence. The castle enjoys panoramic views of the Weald of Kent and East Sussex to the south. Partial excavation has shown that the castle was built during the latter half of the 12th century, in order to control the road which led from Maidstone c.9km to the north to the channel ports of Rye and Old Winchelsea.

The monument's most prominent feature is a square stone keep, now ruined, built on the southern edge of the spur, towards the centre of an artificially raised and levelled, roughly west-east aligned oblong earthen terrace c.100m by c.34m. The keep is constructed of roughly-coursed ragstone and flint rubble. Each face measures c.11m in length externally, and the walls survive to a height of up to 7m and are c.2.4m thick, with additional support provided at the corners by clasping buttresses. The keep, which originally stood to a height of c.20m, had timber floors, now represented by joist-slots visible in the masonry at first floor level. Built within the thickness of the southern wall on the first floor is a barrel-vaulted passage, and traces of a garderobe, or latrine, survive in the south eastern angle. A stair turret located in the north eastern corner provided access to the upper floors. Partial excavation during the 1950s showed that the entrance to the keep, situated on the northern side at first floor level, was at first protected by a small, rectangular masonry forebuilding, the foundations of which have been exposed. This was demolished around AD 1200 and replaced by a staircase which was later encased by protective walls. A short length of these survive at the north eastern angle to a height of up to 4.3m.

The castle and surrounding land, then known as Town Sutton, was granted to William de Valence in 1265 by his half-brother Henry III as a reward for helping the king defeat Simon de Montfort's rebellion. The partial excavation of the monument indicated that the castle was abandoned by around AD 1300, after which time it fell into decay. The castle ruins were restored during the 1980s and the monument is now largely in the care of the Secretary of State and open to the public.

Excluded from the scheduling are all modern wooden fences and the interpretative panel situated to the west of the keep, although the ground beneath these features is included.

ASSESSMENT OF IMPORTANCE

A tower keep castle is a strongly fortified residence in which the keep is the principal defensive feature. The keep may be free-standing or surrounded by a defensive enclosure; they are normally square in shape, although other shapes are known. Internally they have several floors providing accommodation of various types. If the keep has an attached enclosure this will normally be defined by a defensive wall, frequently with an external ditch. Access into the enclosure was provided by a bridge across the ditch, allowing entry via a gatehouse. Additional buildings, including stabling for animals and workshops, may be found within the enclosure. Tower keep castles were built throughout the medieval period, from immediately after the Norman Conquest to the mid-15th century, with a peak in the middle of the 12th century. A few were constructed on the sites of earlier earthwork castle types but most were new creations. They provided strongly fortified residences for the king or leading families and occur in both urban or rural situations. Tower keep castles are widely dispersed throughout England with a major concentration on the Welsh border. They are rare nationally with only 104 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 to wider aspects of medieval society. All examples retaining significant remains of medieval date are considered to be nationally important.

Although the area within the keep was partially disturbed by excavation during the 17th or 18th century, the tower keep castle at Sutton Valence survives comparatively well as a ruined structure and in the form of associated earthworks. More recent part excavation, in the 1950s, has indicated that the monument will contain contemporary archaeological remains and environmental evidence, providing further information about the occupation of the castle.

SCHEDULING HISTORY

Monument included in the Schedule on 1st March 1951 as:
COUNTY/NUMBER: Kent 93
NAME: Sutton Valence Castle

Monument placed in Guardianship on 9th November 1976 as:
COUNTY/NUMBER: Kent 93
NAME: Sutton Valence Castle

The reference of this monument is now:
NATIONAL MONUMENT NUMBER: 27017
NAME: Tower keep castle at Sutton Valence

SCHEDULING REVISED ON 27th February 1996