

EXTRACT FROM ENGLISH HERITAGE'S RECORD OF SCHEDULED MONUMENTS

MONUMENT: Artillery castle and associated earthworks at Camber

PARISH: ICKLESHAM
RYE

DISTRICT: ROTHER

COUNTY: EAST SUSSEX

NATIONAL MONUMENT NO: 27067

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE(S): TQ92121851

DESCRIPTION OF THE MONUMENT

The monument includes an artillery castle which survives in ruined form, and a series of associated, surrounding earthworks, situated on low-lying ground c.2km north of the modern Sussex coast. The three-storeyed castle, the walls of which stand to a height of up to c.18m, is Listed at Grade I. It is now surrounded by reclaimed marshland, but was originally constructed to fortify the northern end of a long shingle spit which protected the open water of the Camber, the seaward entry to the port of Rye c.2km to the north.

The castle buildings have been shown by part excavation between 1963-83 to result from at least three main phases of construction taking place between 1512-43, during which time the defences underwent radical redesign and redevelopment. They are built of local stone, probably from quarries at nearby Fairlight, Playden and Hastings, and from Mersham near Ashford in Kent. Additional building materials include Caen stone reused from the newly dissolved religious houses at Winchelsea c.1.5km to the south west, local timber and yellow bricks fired on site. The first phase dates to 1512-14 when documentary evidence suggests that the landowner, Edward Guldeford, began to build a circular one-storeyed artillery tower, topped with an open platform designed to house heavy guns, measuring 19.5m in diameter and c.9m high. This survives as the lower part of the central citadel of the completed castle.

The second phase of construction took place between 1539-40 in the face of the political crisis and consequent fear of invasion occasioned by Henry VIII's divorce of Catherine of Aragon in 1533. This resulted in an elaborate concentric structure of four stirrup-shaped towers linked to each other by an eight-sided curtain wall and to a gallery around the remodelled and heightened central citadel by radiating vaults. Access to the castle was by way of a rectangular gatehouse to the north west.

Work on the final phase began in 1542 and included the replacement of the earlier, stirrup-shaped outer towers with four semicircular bastions, the thickening of the octagonal curtain wall with an outer skin of masonry and some remodelling of the gatehouse.

The castle buildings are surrounded by a group of associated earthworks including, to the north west, a causeway which leads up to the gatehouse. This survives as an earthen bank which extends out into the surrounding marshland for at least 20m. The bank is c.7m wide and up to c.1.5m high. Also to the north west of the castle buildings is a rectangular enclosure which survives in earthwork form. This was found during investigations in 1974 to have been

originally a walled structure built with the same type of yellow bricks used in the construction of the castle buildings. To the north east of the enclosure are the remains of an associated small building also constructed of yellow brick. Further earthworks are visible on aerial photographs. Some of these are thought to be connected with defences and army training activities dating to World War II.

By 1548 the castle was rendered largely obsolete by the silting of the Camber channel, a process exacerbated by the inning of the surrounding marshes to create agricultural land. It was, however, maintained in working order throughout the 16th century. The process of abandonment began in 1637 when the garrison was disbanded and all ordnance removed, and by 1643 the lead had been stripped from the roof.

The monument was purchased by the Department of National Heritage in 1977, when it was placed in the care of the Secretary of State. Since then it has been the subject of a comprehensive programme of restoration and repair. Excluded from the scheduling are all gates, waymark posts, concrete marker posts, signs, wooden steps, and all modern fixtures and fittings, although the ground beneath all these features is included.

ASSESSMENT OF IMPORTANCE

Artillery castles were constructed as strong stone defensive structures specifically to house heavy guns. Most date from the period of Henry VIII's maritime defence programme between 1539 and 1545, though the earliest and latest examples date from 1481 and 1561 respectively. They were usually sited to protect a harbour entrance, anchorage or similar feature.

These monuments represent some of the earliest structures built exclusively for the new use of artillery in warfare and can be attributed to a relatively short time span in English history. Their architecture is specific in terms of date and function and represents an important aspect of the development of defensive structures generally.

Although documentary sources suggest that 36 examples originally existed, all on the east, south and south east coasts of England, only 21 survive. All examples are considered to be of national importance.

The artillery castle at Camber survives well, retaining much of its original fabric in unaltered form. The history of the monument is documented by contemporary records, and a modern, comprehensive programme of excavation and building recording has provided further evidence for its development over the years. The castle's importance is enhanced by the unusual survival of contemporary, associated structures in the area surrounding the main building.

SCHEDULING HISTORY

Monument included in the Schedule on 12th February 1919 as:

COUNTY/NUMBER: Sussex 3

NAME: Camber Castle

Monument placed in Guardianship on 25th April 1967 as:

COUNTY/NUMBER: Sussex 3

NAME: Camber Castle

Scheduling amended on 5th March 1969:

COUNTY/NUMBER: Sussex 3

NAME: Camber Castle

Scheduling amended on 1st April 1974 to:

COUNTY/NUMBER: East Sussex 3

NAME: Camber Castle

The reference of this monument is now:
NATIONAL MONUMENT NUMBER: 27067
NAME: Artillery castle and associated earthworks at Camber

SCHEDULING AFFIRMED ON 13th June 1996