

EXTRACT FROM ENGLISH HERITAGE'S RECORD OF SCHEDULED MONUMENTS

MONUMENT: Motte castle known as Dane's Camp 400m south of Hampden House

PARISH: GREAT AND LITTLE HAMPDEN

DISTRICT: WYCOMBE

COUNTY: BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

NATIONAL MONUMENT NO: 27132

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE(S): SP84740203

DESCRIPTION OF THE MONUMENT

The motte castle known as Dane's Camp lies to the north of the village of Great Hampden and some 400m south of Hampden House.

The castle occupies a commanding position overlooking lower ground to the north west and the former line of the Grim's Ditch, now overlain by the St Mary Magdalen's Church and the grounds of Hampden House. The monument includes a large, steep-sided circular mound (or motte), approximately 20m in diameter and 2.5m high, surmounted by a level platform measuring 10m across. The motte is surrounded by a dry ditch, averaging 4m in width and 1m deep, which is broken by narrow causeways to the north west and south east. The north western causeway merges with a slight ramp ascending the motte, and is thought to be the original entrance. The second causeway, with no ramp evident, is considered to be a later addition, perhaps reflecting the mound's later use as an ornamental feature within the grounds of Hampden House. The motte would originally have supported a tower, probably built in timber. A small depression in the centre of the platform marks the location of a limited excavation in 1855, which consisted of a single, narrow shaft. Additional defence may have been provided by a palisade surrounding the ditch and a gate controlling the entrance.

The motte is thought to have been a temporary fortification, serving as a base for operations of limited duration in the early stages of the Norman Conquest. Place-name evidence from the surrounding field and adjacent copse suggests that a windmill may later have stood upon the mound. This is not, however, corroborated by physical evidence, and the buried remains of the original tower's foundations are expected to survive largely undisturbed.

All fences and fence posts are excluded from the scheduling although the ground beneath is included.

ASSESSMENT OF IMPORTANCE

Motte castles are medieval fortifications introduced into Britain by the Normans. They comprised a large conical mound of earth or rubble, the motte, surmounted by a palisade and a stone or timber tower. In a majority of examples an embanked enclosure containing additional buildings, the bailey, adjoined the motte. Motte castles and motte-and-bailey castles acted as

garrison forts during offensive military operations, as strongholds, and, in many cases, as aristocratic residences and as centres of local or royal administration. Built in towns, villages and open countryside, motte castles generally occupied strategic positions dominating their immediate locality and, as a result, are the most visually impressive monuments of the early post-Conquest period surviving in the modern landscape. Over 600 motte castles and motte-and-bailey castles are recorded nationally, with examples known from most regions. Some 100-150 examples do not have baileys and are classified as motte castles. As one of a restricted range of recognised early post-Conquest monuments, they are particularly important for the study of Norman Britain and the development of the feudal system. Although many were occupied for only a short period of time, motte castles continued to be built and occupied from the 11th to the 13th centuries, after which they were superseded by other types of castle.

Dane's Camp is a very well preserved example of an early medieval motte castle. The mound will retain buried evidence for the structures which stood on the summit, and the silts within the surrounding ditch will contain both artefacts and environmental evidence relating to the limited period of occupation. The old ground surface buried beneath the mound is particularly significant as it may retain evidence of former land use, which will have been degraded elsewhere by more recent cultivation. The strategic position of the castle provides an illustration of the methods by which control of the area was established in the aftermath of the Norman Conquest.

SCHEDULING HISTORY

Monument included in the Schedule on 20th October 1971 as:
COUNTY/NUMBER: Buckinghamshire 109
NAME: Mound (Dane's Camp) 330yds (300m) E of Park Farm,
Great and Little Hampden

The reference of this monument is now:
NATIONAL MONUMENT NUMBER: 27132
NAME: Motte castle known as Dane's Camp 400m south of Hampden House

SCHEDULING REVISED ON 25th January 1996