

EXTRACT FROM ENGLISH HERITAGE'S RECORD OF SCHEDULED MONUMENTS

MONUMENT: Hawridge Court ringwork

PARISH: CHOLESBURY-CUM-ST LEONARDS

DISTRICT: CHILTERN

COUNTY: BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

NATIONAL MONUMENT NO: 27155

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE(S): SP95010583

DESCRIPTION OF THE MONUMENT

The monument includes a small but strongly defended medieval ringwork located to the south of Hawridge Common, on the western side of a dry valley between the Chesham Vale and Cholesbury.

The ringwork is oval in plan, with a level interior measuring approximately 60m east to west and 45m north to south, encircled by an earthen bank and external ditch. The bank varies between 8m and 12m in width and stands nearly 5m above the interior, the steep sides leading to a narrow level area along the top which would probably have been surmounted by a timber palisade during the period of occupation. The surrounding ditch measures between 8m and 11m in width, and is also steep sided, the inner slope forming a continuation of the outer face of the bank. Accumulated silt has reduced the visible depth of the ditch to c.1.5m, but the original cut will be considerably greater - in proportion with the volume of earth required for the construction of the rampart. The ditch is usually dry, although seasonal flooding has been known in the south western arc, and there is a small pond in the north western part of the circuit. The original entrance lies to the east, where a causeway (c.6m in width) passes through the bank, spans the ditch, and rises toward the interior from the slightly lower ground outside.

It has been suggested that the ringwork was constructed in the Saxon period, but it is more likely to have been built after the Norman Conquest. By the 13th century, when the first written evidence appears, the monument was the principal holding of the manor of Hawridge, part of the honour of Wallingford between the 13th and 16th centuries. The manor is believed to have been in the possession of one Thurstan Basset at his death in 1223, passing, through his daughter Isabel, to her son William Mauduit who held the property by 1235 although he was recorded as the patron of St Mary's Church in 1227, and therefore may have come into his inheritance somewhat earlier. The church, which stands c.25m to the north of the ringwork, was rebuilt in 1855-6 using the original stones and retaining the 13th century font. William died around 1257, and was succeeded by his son Sir William Mauduit, afterwards Earl of Warwick. Earl William died without issue c.1268 and his estates, including Hawridge, passed to his nephew William Beauchamp (also Earl of Warwick), although John Beauchamp, probably the earl's brother, held the manor itself at this time. By 1379 the manor had passed to Edward or Edmund Cook: the last recorded tenant for more than a century prior to John Penyston in the early 15th century.

The medieval manor house, which probably stood near the centre of the

ringwork, is thought to have been replaced by a new range in the 16th century. Part of this range, a Grade II Listed Building formerly used as a granary, still stands within the ringwork. By the early 18th century, the manor was held by the Seare family, who also owned nearby Cholesbury. The levelling of the northern section of the rampart is believed to date from around this time, its position overlain by an 18th century farmhouse. Stone blocks, an iron casement and human bones, perhaps related to the early occupation of the site, were found during the enlargement of a garden around 1780. The precise location of this discovery is not known, although it may have been near the section of ditch to the north of the farmhouse which has been infilled to provide both a garden area and a second entrance. The house was renovated and extended in the early 1900s, and the interior of the ringwork laid out as lawns and gardens. The third entrance, a footbridge over the ditch leading to a gap in the southern perimeter, was probably added at this time.

The standing buildings within the ringwork, the wooden footbridge to the south, the well house to the north, and the surfaces of all driveways and paths are excluded from the scheduling, although the ground beneath and surrounding these items is included in order to protect the buried remains of earlier features. The area of the small sunken garden to the south of the house is completely excluded from the scheduling.

ASSESSMENT OF IMPORTANCE

Ringworks are medieval fortifications built and occupied from the late Anglo-Saxon period to the later 12th century. They comprised a small defended area containing buildings which was surrounded or partly surrounded by a substantial ditch and a bank surmounted by a timber palisade or, rarely, a stone wall. Occasionally a more lightly defended embanked enclosure, the bailey, adjoined the ringwork. Ringworks acted as strongholds for military operations and in some cases as defended aristocratic or manorial settlements. They are rare nationally with only 200 recorded examples and less than 60 with baileys. As such, and as one of a limited number and very restricted range of Anglo-Saxon and Norman fortifications, ringworks are of particular significance to our understanding of the period.

Hawridge Court ringwork is a well preserved example of this class of medieval fortification, its later function as a manor clearly recorded in documentary evidence and reflected by the presence of the adjacent church. The defences are largely undisturbed (apart from the short section overlain by the farmhouse), standing near their full height and retaining the original entranceway. The bank will contain evidence for the process of construction (including traces of any timber works) and overlie a sealed ground surface which will provide insights into the appearance of the landscape in which the monument was set. The interior will retain the buried remains of structures and other features dating from the initial period of occupation, and include later structural evidence relating to the remarkable continuity of occupation indicated by the documentary evidence and architectural remains. The date of construction can be determined from artefacts buried within the interior and within the silts of the surrounding ditch. These will also reflect subsequent changes in the function of the site and the status of its inhabitants.

MONUMENT INCLUDED IN THE SCHEDULE ON 25th July 1996