

EXTRACT FROM ENGLISH HERITAGE'S RECORD OF SCHEDULED MONUMENTS

MONUMENT: Tower house in the churchyard of St James's Church

PARISH: HUNSTANWORTH

DISTRICT: WEAR VALLEY

COUNTY: DURHAM

NATIONAL MONUMENT NO: 28589

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE(S): NY94874900

DESCRIPTION OF THE MONUMENT

The monument includes the remains of a tower house of medieval date situated in the churchyard of St James's Church, on the south side of the valley of the River Derwent. The tower house, which is Listed Grade II, is visible as the lower courses of a rectangular building with maximum measurements of 15m east to west by 12m north to south. The remains of the collapsed upper storeys are visible as a spread of material 1m to 3m wide on all sides. The walls, bonded with clay, stand to a maximum height of 1.5m and are at least 1m thick. The vaulted basement of the tower house fell in 1883, but some of the springing on the south side at the western end remains in situ.

ASSESSMENT OF IMPORTANCE

Tower houses are a type of defensible house particularly characteristic of the borderlands of England and Scotland. Virtually every parish had at least one of these buildings. Solitary tower houses comprise a single square or rectangular 'keep' several storeys high, with strong barrel-vaults tying together massive outer walls. Many towers had stone slab roofs, often with a parapet walk. Access could be gained through a ground floor entrance or at first floor level where a doorway would lead directly to a first floor hall. Solitary towers were normally accompanied by a small outer enclosure defined by a timber or stone wall and called a barmkin. Tower houses were being constructed and used from at least the 13th century to the end of the 16th century. They provided prestigious defended houses permanently occupied by the wealthier and aristocratic members of society. As such, they were important centres of medieval life. The need for such secure buildings relates to the unsettled and frequently war-like conditions which prevailed in the Borders throughout much of the medieval period. Around 200 examples of tower houses have been identified of which less than half are of the free-standing or solitary tower type. All surviving solitary towers retaining significant medieval remains will normally be identified as nationally important.

Although the upper storeys have fallen, the tower house in the churchyard of St James's Church retains significant archaeological deposits. Tower houses are an uncommon monument type in County Durham and this one will contribute to the knowledge and understanding of higher status medieval settlement.

SCHEDULING HISTORY

Monument included in the Schedule on 17th January 1962 as:

COUNTY/NUMBER: Durham 67

NAME: Remains of Pele Tower south west of Hunstanworth Church

The reference of this monument is now:

NATIONAL MONUMENT NUMBER: 28589

NAME: Tower house in the churchyard of St James's Church

SCHEDULING AFFIRMED ON 19th March 1999