

EXTRACT FROM ENGLISH HERITAGE'S RECORD OF SCHEDULED MONUMENTS

MONUMENT: Walkern Bury ringwork

PARISH: WALKERN

DISTRICT: EAST HERTFORDSHIRE

COUNTY: HERTFORDSHIRE

NATIONAL MONUMENT NO: 29384

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE(S): TL30542610

DESCRIPTION OF THE MONUMENT

The medieval ringwork castle at Walkern Bury occupies a slight spur on the north side of the upper valley of the River Beane, approximately 1.25km to the south east of Walkern parish church.

The ringwork is defined by an oval circuit of ditch and inner bank enclosing a natural knoll and measuring approximately 130m north to south by 100m east to west across the interior. The north western part of this ditch survives as a buried feature, having been infilled and overlain by agricultural buildings around the turn of the century. Elsewhere, the ditch averages 15m in width and up to 2m in depth, with deep deposits of humic silt in the base. To the north, adjacent to Walkern Bury Farm, a section of the ditch has been enlarged to form a pond and both this and a short length immediately to the east are water filled. Sections of the internal bank, doubtless built using upcast from the ditch and perhaps originally surmounted by a timber palisade, survive around the edge of the interior, ranging between 2.5m to 3.5m in width and up to 1.5m in height. An external bank, approximately 7m in width and 0.3m in height can also be traced around the southern half of the ditch circuit. This is thought to have resulted from periodic ditch cleaning, and therefore to contain artefactual remains originally deposited in the ditch during the period of occupation. The original access to the interior is believed to have been provided by a narrow causeway which spans the ditch at the most southerly point, and corresponds to a gap in the internal bank. The interior itself contains numerous undulations. Some of these contain modern brick and tile reflecting former tipping of builders' waste. Others, however, reveal fragments of masonry and large flint nodules and are thought to indicate the survival of buried foundations contemporary with the ringwork's occupation. A low mound, oval in plan (although partly removed by farm buildings on the western side) occupies the northern quarter of the interior. This mound, which may indicate the location of the principal building within the ringwork, may have resulted largely from the enlargement of the northern part of the moat to form an ornamental pond either in the 1880s when the farmhouse was constructed, or during the life of an earlier house which occupied the same site. A small prospect mound located just outside the ditch on the north eastern side of the circuit, may also belong to this period of landscaping. The mound, which measures about 15m in diameter and 2m high, would overlook the pond and provide a vista across the present gardens toward the house. It represents an interesting later use of the ringwork as part of a formal garden arrangement and is included in the scheduling.

The ringwork has been attributed to Hamo St Clare, whose manor at Walkern formed the centre of the St Clare barony in Hertfordshire. Hamo was an adherent of Geoffrey de Mandeville during the mid-12th century civil wars known as 'The Anarchy', and the Walkern Bury ringwork may form part of a group of adulterine, or unlicensed, castles in this area including Anstey, Pirton, Great Wymondley and Therfield, constructed for the protection of manorial property during this turbulent period. As with the majority of unlicensed works, the ringwork was probably abandoned in the latter part of the 12th century as order was restored under Henry II.

A number of features are excluded from the scheduling; these are the stable yard buildings overlying the north western part of the defences, the retaining wall on the west side of the pond, all made surfaces, fences, feed bins and telephone poles; the ground beneath all these features is, however, included.

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.

Despite the part infilling of the ditch, Walkern Bury ringwork remains well preserved and will retain valuable archaeological evidence relating to its construction and occupation. The interior of the ringwork is largely undisturbed and will retain buried evidence for the structures and other features from the period of occupation. The silts within the ditches (and the upcast silts forming a low bank around the southern perimeter) will contain artefacts related to the ringwork function and duration in use. The waterlogged areas, in particular, will allow the preservation of organic remains, including environmental evidence for the appearance of the landscape in which the ringwork was set. The later adaptation of the ringwork to form a component of a landscaped garden is also of note, especially the construction of the prospect mound on the north east side of the rampart. The Walkern Bury ringwork is thought to form part of a group of fortifications constructed on the eastern side of Hertfordshire during the Anarchy. Comparisons between these sites provides valuable insights into the nature of the conflict.

SCHEDULING HISTORY

Monument included in the Schedule on 29th October 1957 as:

COUNTY/NUMBER: Hertfordshire 10

NAME: Walkern Bury

The reference of this monument is now:

NATIONAL MONUMENT NUMBER: 29384

NAME: Walkern Bury ringwork

SCHEDULING REVISED ON 03rd August 1998