EXTRACT FROM ENGLISH HERITAGE’S RECORD OF SCHEDULED MONUMENTS

MONUMENT: Countess Close moated site

PARISH: ALKBOROUGH

DISTRICT: NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE

COUNTY: NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE

NATIONAL MONUMENT NO: 32622

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE(S): SE87952160

DESCRIPTION OF THE MONUMENT

The monument includes the buried and earthwork remains of a fortified medieval manor house located at the top of the scarp above the River Trent floodplain on the south western edge of Alkborough.

Antiquarians from Abraham de la Pryme in the 17th century onwards thought that Countess Close was a Roman fortification. Small scale excavations in 1879 failed to find evidence of Roman occupation, but uncovered arch stones and pottery now thought to have been medieval. Stray finds of pottery found since confirm the medieval dating of the monument. Countess Close is thought to owe its name to a Saxon heiress, Lucy, who was countess in her own right of Leicester, Lincoln and Chester and is thought to have been the daughter of William Mallet, recorded as the main land owner in Alkborough by the Domesday Book. She married Ivo Taillebois, nephew of William the Conqueror, who was Peterborough Abbey's tenant at Walcott and who was given land in Alkborough by the abbey sometime before his death in 1104. Countess Lucy went on to remarry twice, with her manor in Alkborough passing to the son of her second husband who in turn gave property to Spalding Priory. In 1147 a chapel was built following the arbitration of a dispute between Spalding Priory and Peterborough Abbey. It is thought that this chapel was built in or near to Countess Close.

The monument includes a main enclosure, defined by a bank and external moat ditch, with an annex or second enclosure on the south western side. The moat ditches were almost certainly dry moats and never water filled. The whole monument is aligned with the edge of the 30m high steep scarp above the floodplain of the Trent. The bank and ditch between the main enclosure and the annex were levelled in 1965-6, but their position can be seen as soil marks and the course of the moat ditch is marked by a slight depression. The north eastern side is the best preserved section of bank and ditch. Here the moat ditch is up to 1.5m deep and measures up to 15m wide from the top of the internal bank to the outer lip of the ditch. The internal bank runs immediately alongside the ditch and stands up to 3m above its base, 1.5m above the interior of the enclosure. On the north western side, the level of the interior rises so that there is only a slight bank when viewed from inside the enclosure. From the outside it appears to be up to 3m high with the moat ditch continuing with a low external bank separating it from the steep scarp. The level of the annex is generally about 0.2m-0.3m below that of the main enclosure. It has a moat ditch on its north western side up to 2.5m deep and 6m-8m wide with a 1m high bank defining its north western side before the edge...
of the scarp. On the western side of the annex there is a slightly raised
level area which is considered to have been a building platform for a range of
buildings. In the eastern part of the annex there is a broad depression which
is characteristic of areas used for holding livestock. The main enclosure,
which measures approximately 80m by 90m internally, also has a level raised
area on the western side. This is considered to be the building platform for
the main hall and associated buildings, possibly including the chapel built in
1147. The stonework found in 1879 came from the south western corner of the
main enclosure. On the eastern side the ground is quite stony, which may
indicate further building remains or yard surfaces.
The telegraph pole near Vicarage Lane, all modern fencing and sign posts are
excluded from the scheduling, although the ground beneath is included.

ASSESSMENT OF IMPORTANCE

Around 6,000 moated sites are known in England. They consist of wide ditches,
often or seasonally water-filled, partly or completely enclosing one or more
islands of dry ground on which stood domestic or religious buildings. In some
cases the islands were used for horticulture. The majority of moated sites
served as prestigious aristocratic and seigneurial residences with the
provision of a moat intended as a status symbol rather than a practical
military defence. The peak period during which moated sites were built was
between about 1250 and 1350 and by far the greatest concentration lies in
central and eastern parts of England. However, moated sites were built
throughout the medieval period, are widely scattered throughout England and
exhibit a high level of diversity in their forms and sizes. They form a
significant class of medieval monument and are important for the understanding
of the distribution of wealth and status in the countryside. Many examples
provide conditions favourable to the survival of organic remains.

Countess Close includes substantial upstanding medieval earthworks and will
retain additional buried remains including building foundations, rubbish pits,
and evidence of both agricultural and small scale industrial activity. Its
historical association with Countess Lucy implies that it is an early example
of a moated site. The monument's importance is further enhanced by its
proximity to Julian's Bower, a rare survival of a medieval turf maze and the
subject of a separate scheduling.

SCHEDULING HISTORY

Monument included in the Schedule on 23rd February 1971 as:
COUNTY/NUMBER: Lincolnshire 199
NAME: Earthwork in Countess Close

Scheduling amended on 1st April 1974 to:
COUNTY/NUMBER: Humberside 179
NAME: Earthwork in Countess Close

Scheduling amended on 1st April 1996 to:
COUNTY/NUMBER: North Lincolnshire 179
NAME: Earthwork in Countess Close

The reference of this monument is now:
NATIONAL MONUMENT NUMBER: 32622
NAME: Countess Close moated site

SCHEDULING REVISED ON 16th April 1999