

EXTRACT FROM ENGLISH HERITAGE'S RECORD OF SCHEDULED MONUMENTS

MONUMENT: Kirkoswald Castle moated site

PARISH: KIRKOSWALD

DISTRICT: EDEN

COUNTY: CUMBRIA

NATIONAL MONUMENT NO: 32898

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE(S): NY55934100

DESCRIPTION OF THE MONUMENT

The monument includes the upstanding and buried remains of Kirkoswald Castle, a class of medieval castle known as an enclosure castle, together with the surrounding moat, the island created by the moat, a stone bridge near the moat's south eastern corner, and an outer bank flanking the northern and western sides of the moat. It is located on slightly rising ground a short distance south east of Kirkoswald village.

A timber tower is thought to have been erected here by Ranulph Engaine in the mid-12th century. The first documentary evidence for the castle is a licence to fortify granted to Hugh de Morville in 1201. In 1314 the castle was destroyed by Robert Bruce but had been rebuilt six years later. Towards the end of the 15th century a great hall and chapel had been added and the moat dug by the then owners, the Dacre family. By the end of the 16th century the castle was reportedly in need of repair, however, such work does not appear to have been carried out for in 1604 the owner, Lord William Howard began dismantling the castle. Demolition continued for the next 30 years during which time material from Kirkoswald was sent to another Howard property, Naworth Castle, Lowther Hall, and many of the buildings in Kirkoswald village. The remaining upstanding medieval fabric is of red sandstone and includes the north western corner turret of the north eastern angle tower which still stands almost to its original three storey height and contains architectural features such as doorways and small lancet openings or windows. Small fragments of the adjoining curtain wall, great hall and north east tower also remain above ground. The south eastern angle tower survives to first floor level and contains a round-arched doorway, window and vaulted ceiling. Parts of the ground floor of the south western angle tower still survive above ground level but much of the south wall has collapsed outwards into the moat in recent years. Earthwork remains consists of the lower courses of the north eastern angle tower, the great hall with a turret on its northern side, the curtain wall on the castle's east and west sides, and guard chambers flanking a gateway in the west curtain wall. The castle sits on an irregularly-shaped island, the north west corner of which has been made into a separate island by the cutting of an 'L'-shaped ditch to connect with the north and west arms of the moat. The moat remains waterlogged in places, measures 9m-12m wide with traces of stone revetment, and is crossed by a sandstone bridge close to its south eastern corner. The original access across the moat may have been over the west arm where faint traces of a causeway are suggested. Flanking the north and west arms of the moat is an outer bank. This bank varies in width,

being approximately 5m wide on the west side, however, it measures up to 17m wide in places on the north side but reduces markedly in both height and width towards the north east corner.

Kirkoswald Castle is a Listed Building Grade II.

All fence posts and gateposts are excluded from the scheduling, although the ground beneath these features is included.

ASSESSMENT OF IMPORTANCE

An enclosure castle is a defended residence or stronghold, built mainly of stone, in which the principal or sole defence comprises the walls and towers bounding the site. Some form of keep may have stood within the enclosure but this was not significant in defensive terms and served mainly to provide accommodation. Larger sites might have more than one line of walling and there are normally mural towers and gatehouses. Outside the walls a ditch, either waterfilled or dry, crossed by bridges may be found. The first enclosure castles were constructed at the time of the Norman Conquest. However, they developed considerably in form during the 12th century when defensive experience gained during the Crusades was applied to their design. The majority of examples were constructed in the 13th century although a few were built as late as the 14th century. Some represent reconstructions of earlier medieval earthwork castles of the motte and bailey type, although others were new creations. They provided strongly defended residences for the king or leading families and occur in both urban and rural situations. Enclosure castles are widely dispersed throughout England, with a slight concentration in Kent and Sussex supporting a vulnerable coast, and a strong concentration along the Welsh border where some of the best examples were built under Edward I. They are rare nationally with only 126 recorded examples. Considerable diversity of form is exhibited with no two examples being exactly alike. With other castle types, they are major medieval monument types which, belonging to the highest levels of society, frequently acted as major administrative centres and formed the foci for developing settlement patterns. Castles generally provide an emotive and evocative link to the past and can provide a valuable educational resource, both with respect to medieval warfare and defence and with respect to wider aspects of medieval society. All examples retaining significant remains of medieval date are considered to be nationally important.

Around 6000 moated sites are known in England. They consist of wide ditches, often water-filled, partly or completely enclosing one or two islands of dry ground on which stood domestic or religious buildings. The majority served as prestigious aristocratic or 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 lies between about 1250 and 1350. They exhibit a high level of diversity in their forms and sizes and form a significant class of medieval monument which are important for an understanding of the distribution of wealth and status in the countryside. Many examples provide conditions favourable to the survival of organic remains.

Despite its ruinous and overgrown appearance, substantial upstanding and buried remains of Kirkoswald Castle still survive. Its location close to the Scottish border meant that it functioned as the first line of defence against attacking Scottish armies and as a focal point for English military campaigns against the Scots in the late 13th/early 14th centuries. As such it provides an insight into the constantly changing design and defensive strategies employed in medieval castles. Additionally the waterlogged parts of the moat will preserve organic remains.

SCHEDULING HISTORY

Monument included in the Schedule on 23rd April 1948 as:
COUNTY/NUMBER: Cumberland 354
NAME: Kirkoswald Castle

Scheduling amended on 1st April 1974 to:
COUNTY/NUMBER: Cumbria 354
NAME: Kirkoswald Castle

The reference of this monument is now:
NATIONAL MONUMENT NUMBER: 32898
NAME: Kirkoswald Castle moated site

SCHEDULING REVISED ON 09th May 2001