

EXTRACT FROM ENGLISH HERITAGE'S RECORD OF SCHEDULED MONUMENTS

MONUMENT: Oswestry Castle: motte and adjoining section of the town wall immediately north east of Christ Church

PARISH: OSWESTRY

DISTRICT: OSWESTRY

COUNTY: SHROPSHIRE

NATIONAL MONUMENT NO: 33815

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE(S): SJ29052981

DESCRIPTION OF THE MONUMENT

The monument includes the earthwork and buried remains of a motte, which was originally part of a motte and bailey castle, the ruins of a stone keep built upon its summit and an adjoining portion of the town wall.

The castle is referred to as 'castelle Lurve' in the Domesday Survey and was constructed by Reginald, Sheriff of Shropshire. Throughout the medieval period the estate of Maesbury (Oswestry) was held by the FitzAlan family, who developed their landholding into the marcher lordship of Oswestry by the late 12th century. The castle was never used as a principle residence of the FitzAlans, but served as a depot for major campaigns against the Welsh, as well as forming the base for a defensive force of light cavalry. The castle was strengthened at the end of the 13th century, but its military significance declined shortly afterwards, although it was used to muster Welsh troops for the war in France in the 14th and 15th centuries. The castle was the scene of a parliament held by Richard II in 1398. It was garrisoned by Royalist troops during the Civil War, but was slighted by Cromwellian forces in 1644, and had been largely demolished by about 1650.

A natural isolated oval mound, probably of glacial origin, has been adopted and utilised to form the motte. It is about 12m high and measures approximately 52m by 72m at its base. Upon the summit and around the top are the in situ and collapsed remnants of the stone keep possibly dating to the 13th century, replacing earlier structures probably built of timber. The remains of the keep are a Listed Building Grade II. The internal layout of the keep is not known, but an inventory compiled in 1398 notes a great chamber, a middle chamber and a high chamber, the Constables Hall, a wardrobe, a chapel dedicated to St Nicholas, a kitchen, larder and buttery. From the evidence of the standing fabric it is considered that the keep was a square or rectangular structure.

To the south east of the keep are the remains of a probable bastion, largely rebuilt in the late 19th century. It is a Listed Building Grade II and is included in the scheduling. The base of the mound is defined by substantial revetment walls of probable late 19th century date, incorporating two gate piers removed from one of the former town gates known as the Beatrice Gate. These walls and the gate piers are also Listed Grade II and included in the scheduling.

The castle bailey, which lies to the south of the motte, probably served as the initial focus for the development of the town. The town had certainly

grown beyond the original limits of the castle bailey before the second half of the 13th century when the town walls were constructed. The location of the bailey is recorded in the street names Bailey Street and Bailey Head, although its exact extent is not certain and is therefore not included in the scheduling.

An archaeological excavation on top of the motte undertaken in 1988 revealed a metre thick layer of demolition rubble dating to the 17th century, whilst in a trench dug at the base of the mound a small section of a substantial wall, thought to be part of the 13th century town defences, was found. This wall is approximately 2m wide, aligned south west-north east, and is built of mortared rubble with its eastern side faced with dressed sandstone blocks. An opening through the wall was uncovered and is believed to mark the position of an original postern gate. The wall would appear to overlie the remains of the motte ditch and it thus post-dates the construction of the motte. This section of the town wall has been consolidated and remains have been exposed. In the late 19th century the castle mound was extensively landscaped in order to create a public pleasure ground. The earliest large scale Ordnance Survey map published in 1874 shows a series of terraces defining a spiralling path around the mound. This scheme formed the basis of the subsequent landscaping which included the construction of a stone wall around the top of mound. All these structural features are included in the scheduling.

A number of features are excluded from the scheduling, these are; the surfaces of all modern paths, all modern fences and railings, the floodlights and the Victorian fountain to the south of the mound; the ground beneath all these features is, however, included.

ASSESSMENT OF IMPORTANCE

Motte and bailey castles are medieval fortifications introduced into Britain by the Normans. They comprised a large conical mound of earth or rubble, the motte, surmounted by a palisade and a stone or timber tower. In a majority of examples an embanked enclosure containing additional buildings, the bailey, adjoined the motte. Motte castles and motte-and-bailey castles acted as garrison forts during offensive military operations, as strongholds, and, in many cases, as aristocratic residences and as centres of local or royal administration. Built in towns, villages and open countryside, motte and bailey castles generally occupied strategic positions dominating their immediate locality and, as a result, are the most visually impressive monuments of the early post-Conquest period surviving in the modern landscape. Over 600 motte castles or motte-and-bailey castles are recorded nationally, with examples known from most regions. As one of a restricted range of recognised early post-Conquest monuments, they are particularly important for the study of Norman Britain and the development of the feudal system. Although many were occupied for only a short period of time, motte castles continued to be built and occupied from the 11th to the 13th centuries, after which they were superseded by other types of castle.

The remains of the motte, forming part of the motte and bailey castle in Oswestry, survive well. The motte, together with the area of the bailey indicated by street names, provides evidence of the changing nature of the military and economic conditions during the medieval and post-medieval periods which shaped the town. Episodes in the history of the castle and the town are well documented.

In addition to the remnants of the stone keep, buried remains of earlier structures that stood on the motte will survive. The surviving structural, artefactual and organic remains, together with the historical sources, will provide valuable evidence about the activities and the lifestyle of the inhabitants of the castle. Archaeological investigation undertaken in 1988 has helped to demonstrate the nature and extent of the buried remains of the castle and the adjoining part of the town wall.

The monument is a significant public amenity and has considerable educational value. It remains a prominent feature within the landscape.

SCHEDULING HISTORY

Monument included in the Schedule on 9th November 1961 as:

COUNTY/NUMBER: Shropshire 203

NAME: Remains of Castle, Oswestry

The reference of this monument is now:

NATIONAL MONUMENT NUMBER: 33815

NAME: Oswestry Castle: motte and adjoining section of the town wall immediately north east of Christ Church

SCHEDULING AFFIRMED ON 03rd July 2000