

EXTRACT FROM ENGLISH HERITAGE'S RECORD OF SCHEDULED MONUMENTS

MONUMENT: Beauchamp Court moated site

PARISH: ALCESTER

DISTRICT: STRATFORD ON AVON

COUNTY: WARWICKSHIRE

NATIONAL MONUMENT NO: 35052

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE(S): SP08495871

DESCRIPTION OF THE MONUMENT

The monument includes a medieval moated site located at Beauchamp Court, on the west bank of the River Arrow. Beauchamp's Court came to the Beauchamp family in 1266 and in 1340 Giles de Beauchamp obtained a licence to crenellate his manor and to surround it with a wall of stone and lime. In 1503, on the death of Richard Beauchamp, the manor passed by marriage to Robert, Lord Willoughby de Broke and subsequently to Fulke Greville. Leland, the antiquarian, noted in 1545 that Fulke Greville was building at Beauchamp with stone taken from Alcester priory. Beauchamp Court ceased to be the principal seat of the Grevilles after the first Lord Brooke had acquired Warwick Castle in 1604, and the last member of the family to occupy Beauchamp Court appears to have died in 1653. The house was empty in 1665 and by 1667 had been partly demolished, with the remainder in use as a farm house. The present building known as Beauchamp Court, a Listed Building Grade II, dates from the 18th century, and is located approximately 300m to the east of the moat. The building and its surrounding farm buildings are not included in the scheduling.

The medieval complex takes the form of a moated island together with a fishpond, located immediately to the south east of the island, and a series of enclosures, including evidence of medieval ridge and furrow cultivation, extending to the north of the moat. The moated island, fishpond and enclosures cover an area measuring approximately 330m by 200m and are believed to represent the remains of a medieval manorial complex.

The island is subrectangular in plan, measuring approximately 52m by 38m, lying about 1m above the ground level to the south of the moat. The surface of the island is slightly raised to the east and at the north west corner, indicating the location of the buried remains of buildings, such as the manor house and ancillary buildings, which formerly occupied the island. Stonework dating from the 14th century has been recorded from the site.

The island is enclosed by a moat measuring up to 16m wide and 1.5m deep. The northern moat arm retains some water and is lined by an external bank 5m in width and standing up to 2m above the base of the moat. The east arm is water-filled and widens at the north east corner, measuring up to 35m in width. Water was formerly provided via a channel linking the north east corner of the moat to the adjacent river. The south and west moat arms have been partly infilled and, now visible as shallow depressions, will survive as buried features. The remains of a subrectangular fishpond lies immediately adjacent to the south eastern corner of the moat. The fishpond, now dry, measures 60m

by 14m and up to 1m deep.

A series of dry channels form enclosures on the north side of the moat. An east-west channel, measuring 3m wide by 0.4m deep, lies approximately 10m north of, and parallel to, the external bank lining the north moat arm. The ditch, about 100m in length, feeds into a roughly subrectangular hollow at its east end. The hollow, measuring approximately 28m by 20m and 0.5m deep with irregular edges, is thought to represent a pond. Another channel following, a sinuous line, leads northward from the pond.

A further channel, leading northward from the east-west ditch, branches into a broad channel marking the eastern and southern extent of an area of well-preserved broad ridge and furrow aligned east-west. The ridge and furrow, measuring approximately 8m in width and up to 0.5m in height, is marked by headlands to the east and west. A small area of ridge and furrow on a similar alignment is visible on lower lying ground to the east, towards the river, and is cut by a curving channel, aligned north-south. The channels formed part of the system of water management.

All fence posts, telegraph posts and water troughs are excluded from the scheduling, although the ground beneath these features 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.

A fishpond is an artificially created pool of slow moving freshwater constructed for the purpose of cultivating, breeding and storing fish to provide a constant and sustainable food supply. Groups of up to twelve ponds variously arranged in a single line or in a cluster and joined by leats have been recorded. The ponds may be of the same size or of several different sizes with each pond being stocked with different species or ages of fish. The size of the pond was related to function, with larger ponds thought to have had a storage capability whilst smaller, shallower ponds were used for fish cultivation and breeding. Fishponds were maintained by a water management system which included inlet and outlet channels. The tradition of constructing and using fishponds in England began during the medieval period and peaked in the 12th century and were largely built by the wealthy sectors of society. Despite being relatively common, fishponds are important for their associations with other classes of medieval monument and in providing evidence of the site economy.

The medieval moated site, fishpond and enclosures at Beauchamp Court survive well as a series of earthworks and buried deposits. Waterlogging will preserve organic remains (such as timber, leather, and seeds) which will give an insight into domestic and economic activity on the site. In addition, the artificially raised ground will preserve evidence of the land use prior to construction. The good survival of the complex will preserve valuable evidence of the way in which these components of the medieval landscape developed and interrelated.

MONUMENT INCLUDED IN THE SCHEDULE ON 18th September 2001