

MONUMENT: Moated site and monastic retreat at Crowle Court

PARISH: CROWLE

DISTRICT: WYCHAVON

COUNTY: WORCESTERSHIRE

NATIONAL MONUMENT NO: 30049

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE: SO92105598

DESCRIPTION OF THE MONUMENT

The monument includes the buried and earthwork remains of the moated medieval monastic retreat at Crowle Court. It was an estate of the Bishop of Worcester from the 9th century and later formed a manor of the Priory of Worcester, which is believed to have acted as a summer residence or retreat during the 14th to 16th centuries and acted as the retirement home of Prior Moore on the eve of the Dissolution.

The moated site lies on a plateau with rising ground to the west and north, whilst to the east and south the ground slopes gently down to the Bow Brook and its tributary. The parish church of Crowle, a Grade II* Listed Building, lies adjacent to the moat on its west side but is not included in the scheduling.

The moat is orientated south east to north west and measures approximately 100m by 80m externally. The arms are uniform, measuring approximately 10m across, except the southern part of the eastern arm which is wider, measuring up to 15m across. The moat is compact, defining a sub-rectangular island and survives as an earthwork ditch on its western, northern and eastern sides, the western arm being shallower than the water-filled northern and eastern arms. The southern arm of the moat was infilled after 1860, in order to extend the farmyard. Both this and the open arms of the moat will preserve artefactual and environmental evidence relating to the construction and use of the moat. The interior of the moat island is undulating and raised 1m to 2m above the surrounding ground level. A house originally stood on the island, and both descriptions and engravings confirm it was constructed of stone and timber, including several chambers. The manor house is described in 1533 and included a lord's chamber, a second chamber with a study, a guest chamber and a parlour with a lower chamber next to it. In addition, there was a dormitory with five beds, and a further four small chambers next to it, each with five beds, as well as a fully equipped kitchen and a great hall with a dias and also a gatehouse.

Documents refer to medieval structures including the manor house, tithe barn, stables, kennel, dovecote, and a gatehouse. It is believed that the court yard area to the south of the moat island and to the east of the tithe barn will preserve evidence of these buildings and of other lesser structures and any phases in their development and construction. A raised platform occupies the northern two thirds of the island, on which stands the late 19th century farmhouse. The farmhouse and its ancillary domestic buildings are excluded from the scheduling, although the ground beneath them is included. To the north west of the

farmhouse are the single storey remains of a late medieval stone building, with some brick additions, a brick floor, and a large stone inglenook fireplace, including a massive stone lintel, and a high quality two light stone window. The building, which is Listed Grade II, was latterly used as a cider house and is known as The Kitchen. It is believed to be the late medieval, free standing kitchen associated with the medieval manor house, and is included in the scheduling. To the north east of The Kitchen is a well and other remains, including a large stone vat or trough believed to be associated with the occupation of the medieval manor; these remains are also included in the scheduling.

The tithe barn, which stands to the south west of the moat, is built of Lias limestone, with 10m span trusses and was originally over 30m long and of seven bays, although the four southern bays have now collapsed. The tithe barn has been dated by dendrochronology to 1354-6, with documented 16th century repairs. The barn is Listed Grade II and is excluded from the scheduling, although the ground beneath it is included. To the east of the tithe barn is an open yard and then, further east, lying parallel to the barn, is a range of single storey 19th century animal sheds and farm buildings. These 19th century farm buildings are excluded from the scheduling, although the ground beneath them is included.

To the north and east of the moat are, the remains of medieval enclosures defined by earth banks with hedges. The banks are up to 1.5m high and 5m wide across the base, except to the north of the church where they measure 2m high and 6m wide. A lower internal bank, aligned on the north east corner of the moat and orientated north to south, divides the enclosure into two parts. These are believed to relate to gardens and orchards which were recorded at the site during the medieval period. The 19th century enclosure documents refer to these enclosures as 'Court Orchard' and 'Conygare Orchard'. The place name Conygare means rabbit garth or enclosure, suggesting that there was a warren here, although there is no other reference to a warren at the site.

The estate is first documented in Saxon charters dated to the ninth century, describing the boundaries of an estate held there by the Bishop of Worcester. The Crowle estate was later donated to support the priory of Worcester and continued largely in the hands of the church until the 19th century. There are records of numerous disputes over the ownership of the site from before 1086 until 1334, when the estate was finally confirmed to the priory. During the disputes the moat was occasionally tenanted by laymen, including, before the Norman Conquest, the Dane Siward and, in 1334, Peter de Neville. The moated site formed the nucleus of the priory estate or manor and is thought to be the original site of the medieval manor house, which is believed to have been constructed in the 1260s. The estate was largely held by tenants until the 1340s when the priory is thought to have taken it into direct control. By the 13th century the village at Crowle included a church, and 15 taxpayers are recorded in the 1332 Lay Subsidy Roll, suggesting that the village had long been established as part of the estate. The estate is believed to have acted as a summer residence or retreat for the priors of Worcester between the 14th to 16th centuries. The penultimate prior of Worcester, Prior Moore, chose Crowle as his retirement home on the eve of the Dissolution. His diary records investments made at Crowle and a series of repairs and restorations. The documents also refer to the tithe barn, stables, kennel, dovecote, and a bridge over the southern arm of the moat. The estate passed to the Dean and Chapter of the Cathedral of Worcester during the Elizabethan period, although it remained leased out to tenants, who were required to provide a sanctuary for the chapter during outbreaks of plague. The tenants of the estate can be traced until the 19th century when it was, bought by Robert Smith in 1862. In 1854 the house was described as being half timbered with a partial stone undercroft, enclosing a courtyard with two wings and including a chapel with carved corbels and a magnificent dining hall, floored throughout with encaustic tiles. By the time of the sale the house was almost in a ruinous state, although the tithe barn was in good condition and a new set of animal sheds and outbuildings had been built. Ordnance Survey maps suggest that the present house was constructed on the moat island between the 1880s and 1904.

A number of features are excluded from the scheduling; these are the farmhouse and its ancillary domestic buildings, the tithe barn, the range of single storey 19th century animal sheds and farm buildings lying parallel to the barn on the east and all modern paths and surfaces, although the ground beneath these features is included.

A monastic grange was a farm owned and run by a monastic community and independent of the secular manorial system of communal agriculture and servile labour. The function of granges was to provide food and raw materials for consumption within the parent monastic house itself, and also to provide surpluses for sale for profit. The first monastic granges appeared in the 12th century but they continued to be constructed and used until the Dissolution. This system of agriculture was pioneered by the Cistercian order but was soon imitated by other orders. Some granges were worked by resident lay-brothers (secular workers) of the order but others were staffed by non-resident -labourers. The majority of granges practised a mixed economy but some were specialist in their function. Five types of grange are known: agrarian farms, bercaries (sheep farms), vaccaries (cattle ranches), horse studs and industrial complexes. A monastery might have more than one grange and the wealthiest houses had many. Frequently a grange was established on lands immediately adjacent to the monastery, this being known as the home grange.

Other granges, however, could be found wherever the monastic site held lands. On occasion these could be located at some considerable distance from the parent monastery. Granges are broadly comparable with contemporary secular farms although the wealth of the parent house was frequently reflected in the size of the grange and the layout and architectural embellishment of the buildings. Additionally, because of their monastic connection, granges tend to be much better documented than their secular counterparts. No region was without monastic granges. The exact number of sites which originally existed is not precisely known but can be estimated, on the basis of numbers of monastic sites, at several thousand. Of these, however, only a small percentage can be accurately located on the ground today. Of this group of identifiable sites, continued intensive use of many has destroyed much of the evidence of archaeological remains. In view of the importance of granges to medieval rural and monastic life, all sites exhibiting good archaeological survival are identified as nationally important.

The site at Crowle Court was an estate of the Bishop of Worcester from the 9th century, and later formed a manor of the Priory of Worcester which is believed to have acted as a summer residence or retreat for the priors of Worcester during the 14th to 16th centuries and was the retirement home of Prior Moore on the eve of the Dissolution.

Monastic retreats are well documented, although relatively few survive. Many were rented out to tenants, or staffed by caretakers, particularly during the later Middle Ages, rather than being farmed directly by the monastery, and were only occupied by the abbot or other monastic guests for a short season each year. Retreats were high status sites, often including a larger suite of buildings than is generally seen at either granges or manorial moated sites. Many included the dwellings and domestic buildings usually found at a manorial site, which were occupied by the tenant or caretaker, but also included a range of additional buildings designed to meet the needs of the visiting monks. They acted as a retreat from the duties and concerns of the monastery or the heat and bad conditions of the city during the summer. Some retreats were used for hunting, entertaining noble guests and other leisure pursuits, others acted as a retirement place for sick or elderly monks.

Consequently there is a wide range of building remains which may be found at a monastic retreat relating to the varied uses which it may have served.

Features may include; halls, chapels and accommodation; stables, kennels, fish stews, stores for hunting equipment and gardens for meditation and the growing of medicinal herbs, in addition to the usual accommodation, barns and outbuildings of the manorial complex.

The remains of the moated medieval manorial complex and monastic retreat at Crowle Court will preserve evidence of the site's many uses and associated buildings and structures will allow a comparison with the documentary sources. Both documentary sources and archaeological investigations will illuminate the development of the estate and the moat as well as some of the ancillary buildings which existed in and around the moat.

The site survives

AUTHORISED BY: A R Middleton

On behalf of the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport under batch no: 10625

