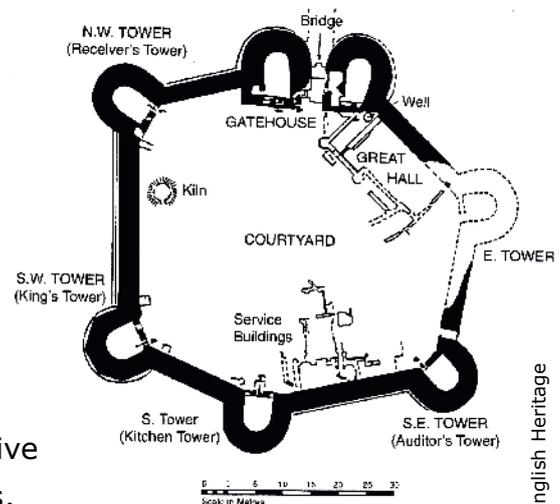


Bolingbroke Castle

An introduction to Bolingbroke Castle

Bolingbroke Castle was built in about 1220 by Randolph de Blundeville who was the Earl of Chester and Lincoln. We think that there may have been an earlier motte and bailey castle on Dewy Hill to the north of the village. The new Bolingbroke Castle was one of the first to be built without an inner keep. Massive curtain walls linked a gatehouse and five towers, and it was surrounded by a moat more than 30 metres wide. There was originally a drawbridge across the moat. Although the castle was heavily fortified its main purpose was to demonstrate the wealth and importance of its owner. It was built on low-lying land and surrounded on three sides by hills. The site was probably chosen so that there was enough land for the castle to be built to the most up-to-date design.



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After Randolph de Blundeville died Bolingbroke Castle was handed down over the years until it became the property of Blanche of Lancaster, who married the powerful John of Gaunt. John and Blanche lived at the castle during the 1360s and 1370s, and their son Henry Bolingbroke was born there in 1366. Henry Bolingbroke became King Henry IV of England in 1399, but instead of

making the castle his home it became the centre for his Duchy of Lancaster estates. During the 1500s it began to fall into disrepair, but it was still strong enough to be used a century later in the English Civil War. In 1643 a group of King Charles I's supporters, the Royalists, were besieged inside it for more than a month by a group of his enemies, the Parliamentarians. The Parliamentarians won the war, and afterwards the castle was dismantled so that it could not be used again. Over time it gradually disappeared until it became nothing more than a bumpy field. It remained in that state until the 1960s and 1970s when archaeologists excavated it to reveal the remains of the curtain walls, towers and moat.

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Today the walls and towers stand to a height of about 4 metres. There is a field to the south of the castle which is known as the rout yard. It contains a number of earthworks (humps and hollows). The most prominent of these is the large rectangular shaped one at the centre of the rout yard. There are various theories about the age and function of this construction. Some people think that it could be the remains of a Civil War infantry fort, but others believe that it was a fishpond or a watering pond for the animals kept on the land. The castle is still owned by the Duchy of Lancaster but it is now in the care of English Heritage. The Heritage Trust of Lincolnshire looks after it on their behalf with the valuable help of the Friends of Bolingbroke Castle. The castle is open to the public every day free of charge.



Why is the castle important?

The castle is very important for a number of reasons. It was one of the first enclosure castles to be built and is therefore an important building in its own right. Because it was the birthplace of a King of England and was also the scene of an important event during the English Civil War it is especially interesting. It is a Scheduled Monument which means that it is illegal to damage it in any way. This legal protection covers not only the ruined castle walls that you can still see today, but also the moat and the rest of the castle site where there are important buried archaeological remains. The site is also home to many different plants and animals including great crested newts. Great crested newts are a protected species and it is against the law to hurt them or damage their habitat. Because of the importance of the castle site as a wildlife habitat it has been designated as a Site of Nature Conservation Importance. Any changes that are made have to take account of both the archaeology and the wildlife.