

Bolingbroke Castle

An introduction to the moat project

When Randolph de Blundeville built Bolingbroke Castle in about 1220 he surrounded it with an impressive water-filled moat. A drawbridge across the moat gave access to the castle through the gatehouse. While the castle was in use the moat would have been regularly maintained to keep it as a large area of open water. After the siege of Bolingbroke in 1643 the castle was deliberately destroyed by the Parliamentarians so that it could not be used again as a stronghold. Some of the castle stone was taken away and used for building in the village, but much of it most probably remained where it had fallen. The abandoned ruins gradually became overgrown and disappeared until they were no more than a series of grassy humps and hollows in a field. However, the shape of the castle and the moat was still evident, especially when it was viewed from the air.



During the 1960s and 70s archaeologists excavated the castle and re-exposed the lower parts of the walls. They also cleared parts of the moat by removing some of the earth that had accumulated in it over time, although they did not dig down right to the bottom of the original medieval moat. This photograph taken in the 1990s shows the moat filled with water and



largely clear of reeds and other vegetation. The medieval moat would have come right up to the castle walls but today you can walk round the outside of the castle on a path between the walls and the present day moat, which is in two sections. One section runs alongside Moat Lane to the NE of the castle and the other forms a horseshoe shape around the remainder of it. There are two causeways. The one in front of the gatehouse dates from Tudor times and replaced the original castle drawbridge, and the other is much more recent.

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Why was the moat restored?

The castle moat is effectively a pond. If a pond is left alone it gradually silts up and reeds and other plants growing on the banks spread further and further out into the water. If left for long enough they eventually cover the pond. This process is speeded up by the plants dying off each winter and the dead vegetation falling and decaying into the water. The pond becomes more and more filled with silt and vegetation. As the silt builds up and the water gradually disappears other plants and grasses begin to grow, followed by scrub. Eventually these are replaced by trees to produce woodland. The pictures on the left illustrate this. As the environment changes, the species of plants and animals that can live there also change. This natural process of change is called ecological succession, and it was happening at Bolingbroke.

In the years since the castle moat was excavated water plants, particularly Reed Sweet Grass had become more and more established and more and more of the open water had disappeared. In parts of it there was no water at all. If the silt and plants had not been removed, the whole moat would have dried up completely. We decided to stop this from happening for two main reasons:



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Firstly the moat is an important part of Randolph de Blundeville's medieval castle. It helps people to imagine what the castle might have looked like in medieval times, and to understand the ruins that are left today.



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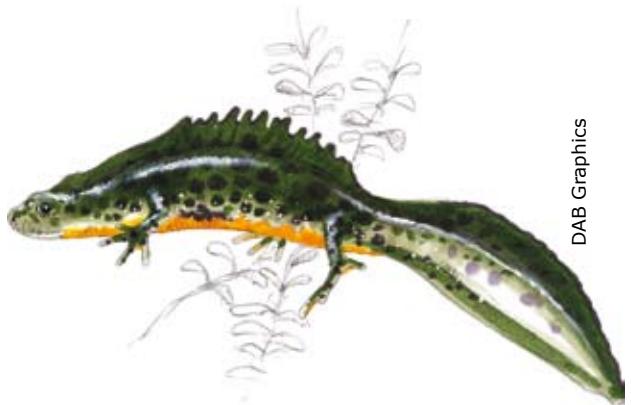
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The moat in the Summer of 2008

Secondly the moat is an important habitat for many different sorts of wildlife including the great crested newt. If it had been left to carry on declining many of the species that live there now would have been lost.

In late 2007 Heritage Lincolnshire began to develop a project to reverse the decline of the moat and to raise the money necessary to implement it. The moat restoration work would remove much of the silt and vegetation to improve the site as a breeding habitat for the newts, and also to enhance the castle and its setting for the benefit of visitors.

Grant funding of over £40,000 was made available through the Landfill Communities Fund of Waste Recycling Group (WRG) administered by the Environmental Body WREN. The Friends of Bolingbroke Castle provided a third party contribution of over £4000, and English Heritage contributed a further £5,000. The Friends also secured a 'Your Heritage' grant of over £14000 from The Heritage Lottery Fund to carry out archaeology and wildlife surveys and to run a series of events which would help people to become involved in the project.



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