

The Story of East Anglia III

Archaeologists, Antiquaries and Artists

Field Visit to New Buckenham

Following the accession of King Stephen in 1135 and the political uncertainty of the Anarchy period which followed, the Norman lord William d'Albini II constructed a castle on his Buckenham estate. This was complemented by a planned town enclosed by a defensive ditch and an extensive deer-park. This field trip explores the surviving evidence for the planned Norman town and the 'landscape of lordship' within which it was situated.

① The north-eastern corner of the town ditch survives very well. This ran southwards and survives as a 'canal' in gardens in the south-eastern corner of the village.

② The northern boundary ditch of the town survives as a field drain and connects to the network of ditches which fed the moat of the castle.

③ Known as the Knight Riders' Ward, the original outer bailey through which the castle was entered was located between the castle ringwork and the planned town. This arrangement was changed in the 13th century, when the western entrance was built.

④ Buckenham castle is a ringwork, with a high circular bank and moat enclosing a flat area of ground. The ringwork is 175m in diameter.

⑤ A 13th-century stone bridge crosses the moat and provides access to the ringwork. It replaced an earlier eastern gateway, which was blocked up.

⑥ Constructed in the 1140s, the circular keep is the earliest example in England. Only the ground floor survives, the castle having been pulled down during the Civil War.

⑦ A second outer bailey was constructed at the same time as the new bridge, although it has now been ploughed flat. This overlooked the Dam Brigg, where the main north-south and east-west routes met and crossed the river.

⑧ St Mary's chapel served the town until the parish church was built in the 13th century. From the 17th century, it was a barn and was converted to a house in the late 20th century.

⑨ Traces of the south-western corner of the town ditch were found during archaeological excavations when these new houses were built. A rabbit warren and dovecote are recorded outside the ditch to the south of the castle.

⑩ Further traces of the town ditch have been excavated here, too. The thatched cottage was one of the first houses built outside the town ditch in the 17th century.

⑪ The market place was the heart of the planned settlement and was originally much larger. The Market Cross was built in the 16th century and is understood to have been relocated from the north-western part of the market place in the 18th century.

⑫ St Martin's church was founded in the 1240s, although only small areas of the chancel and part of the base of the tower still date from this period. Of the rest of the fabric, the south arcade and south door belong to the early 14th century, the north aisle and chapel to the late 15th century, and the south aisle, clerestory, chancel and tower to a major rebuilding campaign of the early 16th century.

