

SHERRINGTON

Castle motte. Grid Ref: ST960392

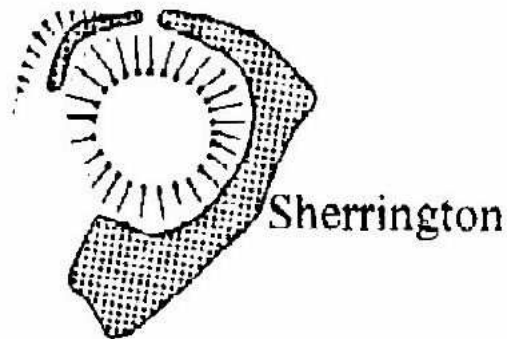
Description and plan

The motte stands to the west of the church, partly hidden by trees and surrounded by a moat, which always contains water, being fed from the springs arising in the nearby hills. The underlying rock is chalk, but the settlement is based on river gravels (Crowley, 1995:235).



The motte at Sherrington

The motte is 48m across and rises 5.5m above the ditch, which is some 3.5m in depth (NMR). In the east, the ditch has been widened to form a moat, which always contains very pure, clear spring water, feeding down from the hills to the south. There are vestiges of a perimeter bank on the summit of the motte (*ibid.*).



Plan of Sherrington motte and moat
(© Prof. Oliver Creighton, University of Exeter)



The moat on the south and east side of the motte, which is to the right

Earthworks in the field to the west of the motte have been interpreted as the bailey. These were discovered during drainage operations, where a low linear mound and an accompanying shallow depression were thought to be the northern arm of the bailey defences. They were sectioned and a substantial ditch, 251 wide was revealed. Tip lines were visible to a depth of 5', but no dating evidence was found (County Field Archaeology Officer, 1973: 137-8).



View from the west of the bailey field, looking east towards the motte. Arrow indicates the position of the motte.



Linear mound in bailey field. The ground falls away to a small lake to the north and thence to the River Wylye.

Tenorial history

In 968, King Edgar granted, along with other lands, ten hides in Sherrington to the Abbey of Wilton (Crittall, 1956: 232-3). By 1066, having been either lost or granted away, these lands came, as two five hide estates, into the hands of Algar and Smalo (Thorn & Thorn, 1979: 48:10-11). In 1086, King William granted all ten hides to Osbern Giffard as the manor of Sherrington. The Sherrington entries in Domesday are listed as separate five hide estates and both entries are identical except for one detail (*see below*). Before 1086, each had paid tax for five hides and there was land for 2½ ploughs, out of which 4½ hides were in lordship, with two ploughs and five slaves. Each estate had two villagers with half a plough and access to half a mill, which paid 7s 6d. There were six acres of meadow, sixty acres of pasture as well as forty acres of woodland and the value for each had been £4, but at the time of Domesday was 100s. It would seem that Algar and Smalo had a very fair division of the estate. The singular difference was that Smalo's estate was paid 3s by a burgess who lived in Wilton (Thorn & Thorn, 1979: 48: 10-11).

A number of Giffard's estates were in West Wiltshire and Sherrington was held in chief for one knight's fee. It is considered by some to have been the caput for a small honour. (Creighton, 2000: 114-5; Crowley, 1995; 237).

Creighton considers the castle to have predated the Anarchy. There was a very low level of subinfeudation and any early church may well have been in an extended bailey to the south and functioned as the castle chapel (Creighton, 2000: 114-5). The mill, which was recorded in Domesday, is close to both church and motte and the segneurial residence was almost certain to have been in the bailey (Creighton, 2012: pers. comm.), possibly under the present manor house, which stands to the south of the motte.

Osbern died about 1096 and the manor passed to Elias, presumably his son, who died about 1130. The next to inherit was another Elias, who was dead by 1162. (Crowley, 1995: 237). The Giffards also held Boyton Manor and later family members are buried in the Church there, so it is unlikely that they dwelt for long in Sherrington.

The nearby church of SS Cosmas and Damian at Sherrington dates from the late 13th or early 14th century, but was extensively rebuilt in 1624. The 13th century building was

almost certainly built on the site of an earlier church, which would have served the community in the keep and bailey, though the dedication is likely to have been different. Cosmas and Damian were twin saints of the Middle East and there are only four churches in England dedicated to them, all associated with crusading lords. A crusading Giffard may well have conceived the idea of dedicating his manorial church to these two saints and indeed, Sir Alexander Giffard was traditionally believed to be the sole survivor of the Battle of Mansourah in 1250, during the 5th Crusade. He returned to Wiltshire and may have built himself a new manor at Boynton, in the church of which he is buried.



Effigy said to be of Sir Alexander Giffard in Boynton Church

However there are two strong contenders for a formal effigy burial at Boynton. The last John Giffard of Brimpsfield (1287-1322) was possibly buried in Boynton church, where his mother Margaret, the dowager lady of the manor, was buried in 1338. John le Boeuf Giffard (1235-90) and his son of the same name (1267-1328), both held the manor from their cousins of Brimpsfield. It is therefore quite possible that this effigy might represent any one of these three John Giffards. (Remfry, 2010: 40).

Sally Thomson, 2013

References

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