

Giants Hill, Rampton

A Medieval Anarchy Castle & Deserted Village Earthworks

This is a short but fascinating walk around Giants Hill which is an unfinished medieval castle dating from 12th Century. It is associated with the remains of a medieval settlement and its arable fields, partly overlying the remains of the medieval village of Rampton.

The castle is linked to the 'Anarchy', a period of civil war and unrest during the reign of King Stephen and Queen Matilda. In 1143, during the height of the Anarchy, Baron Geoffrey De Mandeville seized the Isle of Ely in opposition to King Stephen, ransacked the area, burning Cambridge and capturing and fortifying Ramsey Abbey. In response, King Stephen ordered the construction of a series of castles along the fen edge, at Rampton, Burwell, Caxton, Swavesey and Wood Walton. The peasants of Rampton were instructed to help build the castle and were forced to pull down their own houses to make room for it!

In August 1144 Geoffrey De Mandeville attacked the castle at Burwell while it was still under construction and was mortally wounded by an arrow, dying soon after. With Geoffrey's death the castles were no longer required and Giants Hill was left frozen in time.

2 Entrance. By All Saints Church - nothing now remains of the original Saxon church, although the tower is Norman and the rest of the church is largely 13th and 14th Century. Inside are fragments of medieval wall painting and the 13th Century tomb of a member of the De Lisle family, lords of the manor of Rampton. To the north and east are the remains of the medieval village and the castle itself. Running east to west is a broad ditch, which passes the church and heads east to Cottenham and was probably the main road through the village.

3 The 'North Field'. To the north is an area of ridge and furrow, which is the remains of medieval ploughing that has been preserved in this small area of pasture since the Middle Ages.

4 House Platform and Tree 'Ring'. A medieval house platform. The house, which would have been built of timber and wattle and daub,



A guided walk at Giants Hill

would not have filled the whole plot, which would have included a vegetable garden. The platform is surrounded by a ditch on all sides and has been raised to help keep it dry. A fence or hedge would have prevented livestock from eating the contents of the garden!

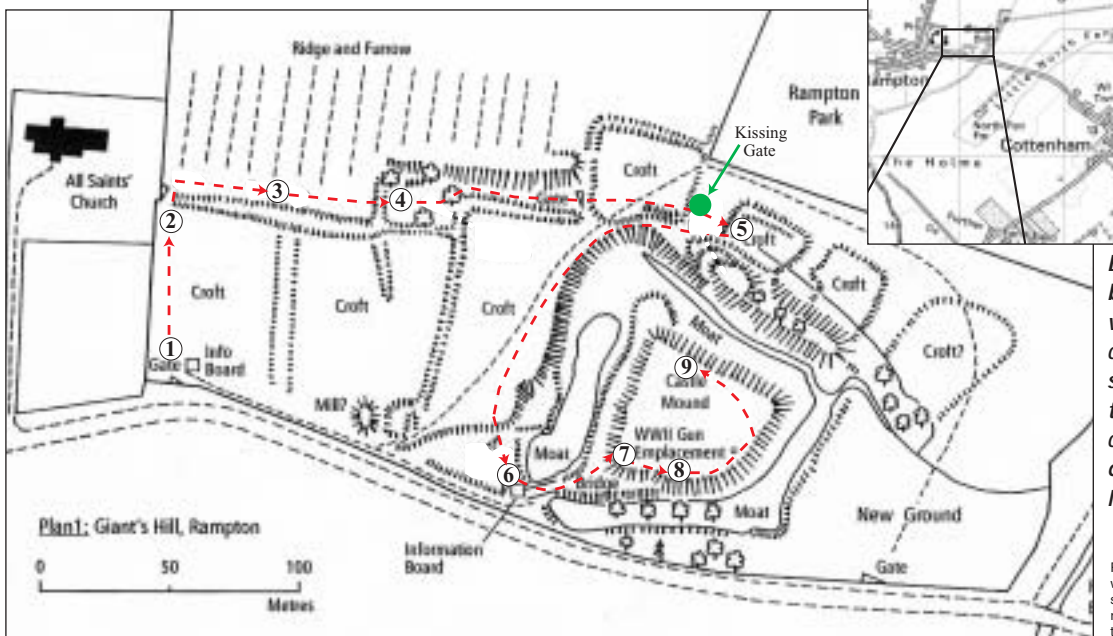
5 Medieval Crofts and Moat Digging Mound. You can see two more house platforms - these are the remains of the peasant's houses and garden, partly covered by mounds of spoil dug from the moat.

6 Moat (east). Standing at the end of the bridge you can see the castle mound of Giant's Hill. The moat is fed by a series of springs.

7 Castle Mound (south side) The castle mound is rectangular in plan, as opposed to the classic Norman period motte, which usually consisted of a large conical mound (such as Cambridge Castle mound). The castle, had it been finished, would have had more in common with a military fort, than the residence of a powerful lord.

8 World War 2 Gun Emplacement. Giant's Hill was built for war but the only military installation on the castle mound was built over 800 years later, during World War 2. The concrete base you can see is a gun emplacement built by the Home Guard, under Major Gordon Fowler (an enthusiastic amateur archaeologist) and under the supervision of Cambridge University.

9 Castle Mound: 14th Century Manor. The castle was never finished but the De Lisle family probably used the castle mound as the foundation for a manor house.



Parking There is a small lay by immediately outside the site, otherwise please park in the village. Please DO NOT park on the road beside the lay by.

The site is owned by Cambridgeshire County Council's County Farms Estate and managed for the benefit of archaeology, wildlife and nature conservation. Please treat the site with respect and follow the countryside code. It is a criminal offence to metal-detect on a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

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