

Membership Form

I would like to become a member of The Friends of Ayton Castle and receive information about the society.

There is no charge for membership.

Voluntary Donation ☐ please tick box if enclosed

NAME

ADDRESS

POST CODE

EMAIL

TELEPHONE

MOBILE

Please send the information requested on this form either by email to: info@aytoncastle.org.uk

or contact us on our website

or post to: Friends of Ayton Castle P.O. Box 151
Scarborough North Yorkshire YO12 4YJ

More information from our website:
www.aytoncastle.org.uk

Friends of Ayton Castle

In 2012 a Friends' group was formed with the following aims:

- To promote historical interest in Ayton Castle.
- To protect, preserve, maintain and enhance the Castle and the natural beauty, wildlife, flora and fauna of its surroundings.
- To promote the appropriate use of Ayton Castle.
- To organise and promote suitable events and activities for the benefit of Ayton Castle.
- To act as a consultant organisation in the future management of the Castle.
- To raise funds to support these activities.

There is no vehicular access to Ayton Castle.

Visitors with cars should park in the village centre of West Ayton where there is plentiful roadside parking. Walk up Yedmandale Road and take the second right turn into Castle Rise. Castle field is accessed through the pedestrian gate at the far end of Castle Rise.

Please observe the country code and enjoy your visit to Ayton Castle.

Join the Friends by completing the attached membership form.

Ayton Castle is a grade 1 listed building and a scheduled ancient monument.

If you have an interest in the maintenance and upkeep of Ayton Castle then we'd love to hear from you.

You can join The Friends of Ayton Castle by completing the attached membership form.

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or write to:

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Scarborough
North Yorkshire
YO12 4YJ**

Ayton Castle



The ruined tower is the last structural element to survive of this important medieval and post medieval manorial complex.

The tower makes a fundamental contribution to the character of the present day landscape.

Troubled Times

In the 13th and 14th centuries the north of England was regularly attacked by Scottish clans or English Border Reiver families. After the Battle of Bannockburn, triumphant Scots reached as far south as Yorkshire and almost certainly attacked the 13th century house which previously occupied the Ayton Castle site.



At the turn of the 15th century, Sir Ralph Eure, a notable figure from Northumberland, married Katherine de Aton and set about building a home that would be more secure against any future Scottish raids. He based his design on a fortified tower, a common defensive dwelling of the day along the Scottish Borders and in his native Northumberland but which was rarely built this far south.

The Fortified Tower

The small, fortified keep was built on the site of at least two earlier dwellings belonging to the de Aton family.

Originally it would have been surrounded by a high outer wall, which provided the first line of defence to the tower. This wall offered refuge to both the resident family and the local community who worked the de Aton's land and who lived in simple huts outside the defensive wall. In times of danger the villagers would herd their animals inside the wall and help defend the tower in return for shelter by their landlord.

By an Act of Parliament in 1455, each of these towers was required to have an iron basket on its summit where the household could light a signal fire to warn of approaching danger.

The only access into the tower was through an armoured door in the west wall. This opened into the undercroft, which was divided into a kitchen and store room. The vaulted stone roof, which still survives, protected the tower above in case of fire. To the left of the entrance door a staircase, built into the thickness of the wall, led to the rest of the castle. The first floor was used as a communal room where estate and household business was carried out and the second floor comprised the family's private quarters. The staircase continued on up to the turret and roof-walk. A secondary staircase in the south-east corner can still be seen today, and joined the store room to the first floor.

Life in a Fortified Tower

As well as the tower, within the outer walls there were other buildings that served the de Aton household. These would have included granaries, stables, barns, a brewhouse and a blacksmith's

forge. Excavations have also revealed the remains of a dovecote which, together with the fishponds (in the field below), are thought to have been principally intended for food production. These were 'living larders' and, due to their construction and maintenance costs, they were often associated with sites reflecting nobility, or religious authority.

In the medieval period dovecotes were subject to manorial monopolies. A range of forms existed but they all featured niches in which the doves would nest. An average dovecote could have 1,000 nesting niches. Open access for the doves was also provided, usually through the roof, allowing the doves to feed in the local countryside. Ground level access was restricted to keep out predators and for security.

Fishponds were artificial fresh-water pools for breeding, raising and storing fish. They were typically associated with high status sites such as manor houses, castles and monasteries. Fishponds were often complex in design, with groups of ponds and several water channels; since they required a fresh water supply, valley locations were typical. Most were close to settlements so that they could be watched, as was the case here at Ayton.

Decline

Fortified towers were built with little consideration for comfort; by the 1500s living standards had improved and the harsh conditions of the castle encouraged the Eure family to move to the relative luxury of their Malton mansion.

Ayton Castle was first leased and then sold, and by 1680 it was unoccupied. Finally, in Victorian times the ground floor was adopted for use as a cowshed.

