Scheduled Monument: RAVENSDALE DEER PARK, LODGE, MILL AND FISHPOND (1021232)

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| **Authority** | Historic England |
| **Other Ref** | SM Cat. No. 534 |
| **Date assigned** | 08 March 2004 |
| **Date last amended** |  |

Description

REASONS FOR DESIGNATION Deer parks were areas of land, usually enclosed, set aside and equipped for the management and hunting of deer and other animals. They were generally located in open countryside on marginal land or adjacent to a manor house, castle or palace. They varied in size between 3ha and 1600ha and usually comprised a combination of woodland and grassland which provided a mixture of cover and grazing for deer. Parks could contain a number of features, including hunting lodges (often moated), a park-keeper's house, rabbit warrens, fishponds and enclosures for game, and were usually surrounded by a park pale, a massive fenced or hedged bank often with an internal ditch. Although a small number of parks may have been established in the Anglo-Saxon period, it was the Norman aristocracy's taste for hunting that led to the majority being constructed. The peak period for the laying-out of parks, between AD 1200 and 1350, coincided with a time of considerable prosperity amongst the nobility. From the 15th century onwards few parks were constructed and by the end of the 17th century the deer park in its original form had largely disappeared. The original number of deer parks nationally is unknown but probably exceeded 3000. Many of these survive today, although often altered to a greater or lesser degree. They were established in virtually every county in England, but are most numerous in the West Midlands and Home Counties. Deer parks were a long-lived and widespread monument type. Today they serve to illustrate an important aspect of the activities of medieval nobility and still exert a powerful influence on the pattern of the modern landscape. Where a deer park survives well and is well-documented or associated with other significant remains, its principal features are normally identified as nationally important. Ravensdale medieval deer park survives well and significant evidence of its original form and method of construction will be preserved within the earthwork and buried remains. It is unusual for such a high proportion of the park pale to survive and for the remains of the associated internal features such as the mill, fishponds and lodge to survive. The waterlogged deposits in and around the site of the mill and the fishpond potentially retain important environmental, ecofactual and archaeological deposits. Such deposits can provide vital information relating to the physical landscape and the way it was managed before, during and after the medieval period. Ravensdale deer park was a major component of the medieval landscape. It was the primary deer park of seven within the Royal Forest of Duffield Frith and contained the Royal hunting lodge of Duffield Frith. The level of survival of the archaeological remains combined with the documentary evidence is again rare and taken as a whole provides an insight into the construction, development and use of deer parks during the medieval period and their position within the wider landscape both during and since their use. DETAILS The monument includes the earthwork and buried remains of Ravensdale deer park and those of the associated lodge, mill, fishpond and trackway all of which lie within eleven separate areas of protection. The site is situated within four parishes, the present parish boundary for Ravensdale Park partly utilises this monument's park pale or boundary bank. The park sits in an undulating landscape which slopes generally to the south. It is divided by three ridges which run roughly north to south forming three valleys. Black Brook runs down the western valley, the central valley of Ravens `dale' is dry although seasonally waterlogged, and Hungerhill Brook emerges and drains the eastern valley. Ravensdale deer park was a distinctive part of the Royal Forest of Duffield Frith which since 1285 had been essentially run as a Royal Forest with its own Forest Courts. After the Norman Conquest in 1066 Henry de Ferrers was given over one hundred manors in Derbyshire which became known as the Honor of Tutbury. He was allowed a private forest which was initially based on Duffield and remained within de Ferrers ownership until their lands were confiscated in 1266. They passed to Edward, Earl of Lancaster and then directly to the crown in 1399 when Henry Duke of Lancaster became King Henry IV. Ravensdale was one seven deer parks within Duffield Frith and later contained the hunting lodge which was visited by royalty and other nobility throughout the 14th and 15th centuries. The earliest reference to Ravensdale is in 1230 when rights were granted to make a fishpond and mill there. The first reference to a park at Ravensdale is in 1297-98. There are many documents referring to repairs both to the park and lodge and to timber felled. There are also many surveys which record the type of trees being grown and their condition at the time. The last known reference to the lodge and park pale is in 1565 when it is recorded that both were in reasonable condition. In 1633 the whole of Duffield Frith was disafforested. The perimeter of the park is defined by a substantial boundary known as a park pale. This comprises a large earth bank, which would originally have been topped by a fence or hedge, and flanked by an internal ditch. At Ravensdale it is estimated that approximately 88% of the boundary bank survives to a height of 0.5m or more. The surviving width of the bank varies from section to section ranging from 1m up to 8m. Very little of the ditch is visible from the surface. It is quite common for the ditch to have been infilled at a later date as the surrounding landuse changed but at Ravensdale it is believed to survive as a buried feature. The infilled ditch is approximately 4m wide and is included in the scheduling adjacent to the internal edge of the bank. A short section of a ditch is apparent just north of Chapel Farm. Here the ditch survives to a depth of approximately 2m and 4m wide but its true form has been distorted by quarrying and the subsequent reinstatement of the land to the east of the pale. There is evidence that the natural landscape was taken into account during the construction of the pale and this would eliminate the need for an internal ditch along certain sections of the perimeter. This is particularly noticeable where the pale follows the eastern edge of the Old Covert. Here the bank survives up to 9m wide and up to 1.5m high from the internal ground surface. To the west of the bank the ground drops away steeply into the Old Covert and therefore functions in much the same way a ditch would have done, to allow deer into the park but to prevent them from leaving. Use of the land in this way is also apparent to the south of Ling Hill where the drop of the hill serves the same function as a ditch to the pale. The perimeter of the deer park was broken by gates. Documentary sources have identified Shuckton Gate and Corkley Gate, both being mentioned in expense accounts from 1313-15 when repairs were made to them. These gates were created by offsetting the boundary bank to form funnel type entrances. This arrangement would allow movement of animals and people in and out of the park to be monitored. Another offset entrance is evident at the point where Hunger Lane meets the park pale south east of Brook Farm. An entrance also existed where Ravensdale Park Road crossed the pale just east of Parkhill Farm and this road exited in the vicinity of Schoolhouse Farm in the south. From Mugginton Lane End to Lawn Cottage this road survives as a terraced track but continues south as a green sunken lane with a dense mixed species hedgerow marking both sides. At Park Farm a narrow sunken track leads off to the east but the main route continued down through Ravensdale itself. The sunken track continues south of Park Farm for approximately 70m. This section survives as a deep gully marked by a hedgerow on its eastern side. South of this point part of the track has been removed by quarrying and the subsequent reinstatement of the land to the east. Another surviving stretch of the lane begins at grid reference SK27784390 and runs south for approximately 190m. This section survives as a terraced track marked by a mixed species hedgerow on both sides. Another feature of the deer park is the medieval deer course. This is approximately one mile (1.6km) and 87m wide and is most clearly understood when viewed on a map or aerial photograph. It is evident as a sinuous feature running from just east of Parkhill Farm to approximately 250m east of Hill Top Farm. The course is particularly sophisticated following the eastern side of Ravensdale itself through the park. Although other courses are known to have had the same valley-side position Ravensdale is thought to be by far the best and at present the earliest known example of a nationally rare deer park feature. Other deer courses tended to follow the valley bottom. The course would originally have been hedged or walled along its length on both sides but is currently defined by broken stretches of field boundary some of which are clearly modern and others of which retain ancient hedgerow species. Because the original boundary of the course only survives fragmentarily, it is not included in the scheduling but its importance should not be underestimated. The continuing respect shown for the course of the chase demonstrates its importance as a landscape feature. Deer coursing is a pastime which probably developed in the 12th or 13th centuries from the simple chasing of deer across country with dogs. It became a complicated and well organised spectator sport. The deer, usually one or two, were chased by greyhounds along a hedged or walled track to a finishing post. Sometimes the hounds were allowed to kill the deer but more usually it was a race to see which dog reached the winning post first. In this case the deer was allowed to escape. Aristocratic spectators usually viewed the race from a grandstand close to the finishing post or followed it on horseback along the outside of the course. At Ravensdale the medieval lodge is situated approximately 150m north east of Schoolhouse Farm. Fieldwalking and geophysical survey have revealed the existence of a high-status building which is confirmed by 14th century documentation. It is situated on a spur overlooking the southern end of the park, a prime position for viewing the end of the deer course and the ornamental fishpond or lake further to the south. Aerial photographs show a `D' shaped enclosure once surrounded the lodge suggesting that it may have been moated. Documentary sources record that in 1314 30 shillings were spent on pales to enclose a small park round the building at Revensdale. Such a feature may have been associated with the moated lodge. During the medieval period a moat was considered to be a symbol of wealth and power and again supports the evidence that the lodge at Ravensdale was a high status building. At the southern end of Ravensdale park, to the east, south and west of Schoolhouse Farm are the earthwork and buried remains of a mill, mill dam and fishpond. This area of the site is very wet boggy and represents the largest and most species rich valley mire in Derbyshire. This area of the park is also protected as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Access to this area is limited due to waterlogging but the mill, mill dam, inlet and outlet leats to and from Black Brook and various platforms are clearly visible on the west side of the access track to Schoolhouse Farm. These remains survive as both earthwork and buried remains. To the east of the track is another flat, open, and waterlogged area. This is believed to be the remains of the fishpond or lake. Lakes of this type have been recognised all over England as decorative features of high status medieval deer parks. At Ravensdale the fishpond would have provided a reflective setting for the lodge. Given Ravensdale's royal ownership it is not surprising that the landscape within the park was ornamental especially in the area of the park overlooked by the lodge. The park itself was a medieval designed landscape. The lake or fishpond would be practical as well as ornamental and would have served as a food source for visitors as well as a water supply for the deer. Situated at the end of the deer course the lake would offer welcome refreshment for the animals at the end of the chase. All modern field boundaries, gates, fences, sheds, yard and track surfaces are excluded from the scheduling, although the ground beneath these features is included. SELECTED SOURCES Map Reference - Author: Ordnance Survey - Title: 1st Edition Ordnance Survey Map - Date: 1870 - Type: MAP Book Reference - Title: Ravensdale Park - Date: 2003 - Type: AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH - Description: from web site: getmapping.com Book Reference - Author: Andy Richmond - Title: Archaeological assessment Ravensdale Deer Park - Date: 2002 - Type: DESC TEXT - Description: Phoenix Consulting Archaeology Ltd Book Reference - Author: Dr C. Taylor - Title: Ravensdale Medieval Deer Park - Date: 2003 - Type: DESC TEXT - Description: Information given in a letter Book Reference - Author: Dr. C. Taylor - Title: Deer Coursing - Date: 2003 - Type: DESC TEXT - Description: Latest research on deer coursing Book Reference - Author: Duffield frith Research Group - Title: Ravensdale Medieval Deer Park - Date: 2001 - Type: DESC TEXT Book Reference - Author: Peter Connolly - Title: Hill Top Farm, Ravensdale Park, Derbyshire Geophysics survey - Date: 2000 - Type: DESC TEXT Book Reference - Author: Peter Connolly - Title: Hill Top Farm, Ravensdale Park, Derbyshire Resistivity survey - Date: 2000 - Type: DESC TEXT

External Links (1)

* [View details on the National Heritage List for England](https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1021232) (From EH UDS to Legacy x-reference)

Sources (2)

* [SDR19647](https://her.derbyshire.gov.uk/Source/SDR19647) Scheduling record: English Heritage. 2004. Scheduling Notification: Ravensdale deer park, lodge, mill and fishpond. List entry no. 1021232. SM Cat. No. 534.
* [SDR24614](https://her.derbyshire.gov.uk/Source/SDR24614) Unpublished document: Jacklin, A (ARS Ltd). 2019. An Archaeological Watching Brief on Land at Ravensdale Deer Park, Mercaston.