

A Guide to Cawood Castle and Garth

Welcome to Cawood Castle and Garth, an important historic site belonging to the Archbishops of York since the 10th Century. In 1986 the people of Cawood bought the Garth to preserve it for the community. We hope you enjoy your visit.

😊 This guide will lead you across the historic site which is situated behind the Gatehouse. From Thorpe Lane looking south, you can see the remains of Cawood Castle or Palace, formerly a country residence of the Archbishops of York from the early 12th Century. The Castle is often referred to as 'The Windsor of the North' due to the numbers of royalty who stayed here.

The Archbishop of York was an important political figure in the country so his palace had to be large enough to accommodate important visitors, including Kings and Queens who always travelled with large numbers of servants.

All that remains of the Castle today is the impressive Gatehouse and the large brick building attached, referred to locally as the Banqueting Hall which is believed to be the site of the chapel. The Landmark Trust restored these in 1986 and the Gatehouse may be rented as holiday accommodation.



Cawood Castle Gatehouse

The Garth

Behind the Castle is 5.3 hectares of grassland called 'The Garth' with moats, fishponds, earthworks and the remains of a rare medieval garden and orchard. These were also part of the Archbishops' estate.

The site is a protected Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM).

Cawood Castle was once a large complex of buildings clustered around one or two courtyards extending as far as the River Ouse. Over the centuries the site has been continuously enlarged, improved and adapted to suit the needs of the various Archbishops who lived here.

The name has changed over time from 'Palace' to 'Castle' with changes in the importance of the building, the added crenellations, fortifications and size. It is believed to have been similar to Cardinal Wolsey's Hampton Court Palace at Richmond in Surrey.

Castle Gatehouse and Banqueting Hall

During the mid 15th Century Archbishop John Kempe built the impressive 3- storeyed Gatehouse and attached Banqueting Hall that remains today. His coat of arms is displayed below the elaborately carved oriel window of the Gatehouse. This was the formal entrance through which visitors passed into the Castle.



In 1531, a castle inventory listed 40 separate rooms including a large hall, porter's lodge, chapel, library, pantry, spicery, livery, butlery, plate room, a great kitchen, brew house, bake house, butlery and stables.

The Great Feast 1466

To celebrate the inauguration of Archbishop George Neville in 1466, the most sumptuous and greatest feast ever recorded was held here. Many Bishops, Earls, Dukes and Lords were amongst the special guests.

The banquet, prepared by many cooks and over 1,000 servants, included 400 swans, 104 oxen, 4,000 patties of venison, 3,000 cold custards, 12 porpoises and 600 pikes and breams. A board celebrating the event can be seen in the Ferry Inn.



Cardinal Thomas Wolsey was the most famous of the many Archbishops who lived in the Castle. After falling out of favour with Henry VIII in 1530, he retreated back to Cawood and is said to have started to restore the Castle, employing as many as 300 workmen a day. The bricks and tiles for the building would have been made on the site, the clay being extracted locally.

He was arrested for High Treason by the Earl of Northumberland in November 1530 and died in Leicester on his way to London. Thomas Wolsey may have been a target of the children's nursery rhyme 'Humpty Dumpty'



*"All the King's horses and all the King's men
couldn't put Humpty together again"*

After Wolsey died, an inventory was taken of the contents of the Castle. There were so many items it took three men three days to count everything. The list included a golden ship, a gold crucifix, candelabra, apostle spoons plus many other gold and silver items used in his residence.

Local man becomes Archbishop

George Mountain, a local man born in 1569, became Archbishop of York in 1628. Because of his childhood wish to live in the castle, he worked hard, rising through the ranks of clergy, to become Archbishop of York. After only a short time as Archbishop he died just before his enthronement the same year. He is buried nearby in All Saints Church. There is a memorial to him on the west wall of the church.



Cawood Church and Castle in 1733

(With permission from York Minster Library)

Destruction of the Castle

During the civil war in the 1640s the Castle changed sides three times but returned to the hands of the Roundheads. Attempts were made to fortify the Castle even though it was by then in a ruinous state.

In 1646 Parliament decide to make untenable seven of the Northern Castles including the one at Cawood. At this time most of Cawood Castle was demolished with the remaining buildings being removed in the 18th Century. Those buildings and the land which was left continued to be used as a farm until the restoration by the Landmark Trust in the 1980s.

Bishophthorpe Palace

After the demolition of Cawood Castle, the residence of the Archbishops of York moved to the Palace at Bishophthorpe, near York. Some Cawood Castle stone was transported to the Palace by river to build the new entrance there.

Much of the remaining demolished stone was robbed from the site and can be seen in many of the houses and walls around the village.



Bishophthorpe Palace Gateway circa 1763-65

Cawood Sword

In 1860 a very rare 12th Century Viking sword, now known as 'The Cawood Sword', was found in the River Ouse at Cawood. One of only a few in the world, and in magnificent condition, it was returned to Yorkshire in 2007. It can usually be seen in the Yorkshire Museum in York.

Previously it was in private ownership and was on loan to the British Museum for many years.

On both sides of the centre of the steel blade are letters: their meaning as yet unknown. An identical sword in the Oslo Museum in Norway was probably made in the same workshop at the same time, around 1100 AD.

[Sword photograph with permission of York Museums Trust \(Yorkshire Museum\)](#)



Follow the footpath that leads between the houses and the Brick Range ('Banqueting Hall'), bearing left towards the trees in the centre of the Garth.

- On the left of the footpath, between the boundary of the site and the footpath, are the remains of the rare medieval garden and orchard dating back to the 13th Century. Some apple trees still grow in the hedgerow.

The Medieval Garth

The large area of grassland to the south of the Castle is called 'The Garth' meaning 'garden' in Saxon. This medieval enclosure contains earthworks, fishponds, moats and the remains of a rare garden and orchard.

The Garth may also have been used for industrial purposes for the Castle, e.g. brick, tile and pottery making, blacksmithing and the keeping of animals. Early maps show the Garth originally extended south towards Sherburn in Elmet and to the east, possibly as far as Wistowgate and Water Row in Cawood.



The Medieval Garden was first recorded in 1235 and was enclosed by a moat. There was also evidence of raised beds for fruit trees.

Medieval gardens were invariably enclosed within banks, ditches, hedges or walls and often contained water features.

The Garth has the remains of two moats and five fishponds, emphasising to Castle visitors the high status of the site.

The windows of the Castle would have overlooked the garden for the enjoyment of residents and guests.

Plants

Many varieties of plants would be grown in the raised beds, including herbs, vegetables and medicinal plants.



Raised flower beds

The plant Madder may have been grown here. It was used to produce the colour red for dyeing cloth. Lavender and Rose flowers would be used to mask smells in the Castle. The Star of Bethlehem, an early medicinal plant, still grows on the site of the old medieval garden today.



Star of Bethlehem

Ponds

Three of the original five fishponds are now filled in. Freshwater fish was an important part of the aristocracy's diet and fishponds are often found adjacent to Manor Houses or Palaces. Dietary regulation by the Church is thought to be another reason for the widespread consumption of fish. Many types of fish were needed to add variety. The eating of meat was forbidden during Lent and also on Fridays and Saturdays. The Garth's central pond is now home to the protected and endangered Great Crested Newt.



Dovecote

At the Broad Lane end of the New Cut, a large round earthwork is visible in the grass. It is a similar shaped feature (B on the map) to the remains of a possible Dovecote at the Archbishops' Palace site at Bishop Wilton. Most large residences would need birds to provide valuable sources of meat and eggs during the winter months.

Kennels

Old maps show a raised area to the east of the Garth (D on map) as the site of kennels. Hunting with dogs in nearby Bishop Wood, south of the village, was a favourite royal pastime for centuries.



Gill Green

Gill Green borders the Garth to the east. Gill (from Old Norse) means a steep sided stream, so this may refer to the remains of the inner moat that runs between Gill Green and the Garth.

The magnificent chestnut trees, by the road, commemorate the Silver Jubilee of King George V in 1935 and the Coronation of King George VI in 1937.



Continue along the footpath, passing the pond on your right.

- On the left, the large depression in the grass was once a medieval fishpond.
- Cross over the moat bridge. The inner moat was part of the medieval garden.
- Continue towards the New Cut Moat at the top of the site.
- You may exit left onto Broad Lane and Gill Green or turn right here onto the tarmac path.
- Follow the edge of the moat until you reach the Bishopdyke path.

New Cut Moat

The south side of the Garth features a massive earthwork called the ‘New Cut’ (‘Cut’ means canal). In 2007, core sampling here found mainly clay soils and mollusc remains, (Swan mussel) suggesting it had been used for freshwater mollusc farming. Alternatively, it may have been a garden feature, a fishpond or swannery, supplying food for the Archbishop’s table or as a quay for boats from the Bishopdyke.

The Bishopdyke

The Bishopdyke is a 10km canal (first known reference in 1228) originating from a spring close to the Huddlestone quarries at Sherburn in Elmet. It joins the River Ouse at Cawood after skirting the west side of the Garth.

Quarried Magnesian limestone was brought by boat to Cawood for the construction of the Castle and for transportation to other building projects, such as York Minster, Eton College and King’s College, Cambridge.

The stone was unloaded onto a quay and sledged to the river. The Bishopdyke also brought fresh water to Cawood (the River Ouse is tidal here) and powered water wheels at the Corn Mill, close to the Castle.



Water Mill

There was a Water Mill for grinding corn at the end of the Bishopdyke close to the Castle Gatehouse. The Mill was referred to in early documents as a 'Soke' Mill, belonging to the Archbishop. He had the monopoly for the milling of the corn produced by village tenants. Leases for the Mill were taken out for the 'longest liver' of the family so often included names of young children to maximise the length of the lease. The current mill building had 3 water wheels in the 18th Century.

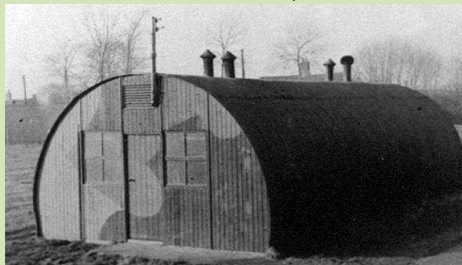


Turn right when you reach the end of the tarmac path.

- You can exit here across the bridge on to Sherburn Street or remain on the Garth to follow the path north towards the trees, with the Bishopdyke on your left.
- On the right are the remains of the Nissen hut bases and earthworks. From here you can explore the wooded area or return to the footpath and continue along the tree line and fence back to the Castle entrance.

World War II Hut Bases

In the grass close to the Bishopdyke are the concrete remains of huts, which were temporary accommodation for children during and after the Second World War. From Oral History interviews with local people, it was discovered that children came to Cawood from Sheffield, Leeds and Bradford schools to harvest potatoes and sugar beet. They stayed on the site in the Nissen huts whilst helping local farmers. The bases are now sites for wildlife such as insects, mosses and fungi.



Nissen hut

Earthworks

There are many earthworks in this part of the Garth. These were surveyed in 2005 and 2006 using non-invasive techniques such as Landscape Investigation, Resistivity, Magnetometry and a Topographical Survey.

These surveys recorded the varying heights and sizes of the mounds and showed areas of burning, small pits and evidence of buildings.

Close by is a quarry pit, a large, semi-circular depression in the grass, from which clay may have been extracted. Handmade bricks and tiles were used for repair and building projects at the Castle.

The New Cut moat ends very close to the Bishopdyke at this point. This prompted questions about their original uses. To answer these, further investigations were needed.

More Archaeological Investigations

In 2008 and 2009 permission was granted to the Cawood Castle Garth Group to dig 6 test pits to investigate the archaeology of the Garth. Volunteers from the village, under the guidance of the York Archaeological Trust's Community Archaeologist, spent ten days trying to answer various historical questions about the site.

What was the purpose of the New Cut Moat? Was it once joined to the Bishopdyke? What is hidden beneath the earthworks?

During the dig in 2009, (C on the map) a large quantity of medieval roof tiles was found, possibly from a demolished building or maybe dumping from the demolition of the Castle.

Also found in the test pits were many pieces of pottery, handmade bricks, charcoal, glass and bones. These are currently being examined (in 2010) and a report is due out soon. No firm conclusions have been reached so far. Further information will be added to the website once the results are available.

Pottery on the Garth

A large amount of broken earthenware pottery, particularly jug handles and 'wasters' (misfired or broken pottery), has been found near the end of the Bishopdyke. These were dated to the 17th and 18th centuries and indicate that a potter with a kiln was working nearby.

- As you approach the Castle you can see on the left, through the trees, the remains of one of the medieval ponds in the private garden.
- 😊 ○ On the right is the end of the inner moat and various other earthworks that surrounded the medieval garden.
- From here you can see the front of the Castle Gatehouse as it would have been seen by visitors arriving from Sherburn Street.
- Thorpe Lane and Cardinal's Court now occupy the site of the main Castle.
- Some of the remaining Castle walls can be seen in Old Road by the river. More remains are preserved below here.