Ancient Wonders E03: Ancient Castles and Hulne Priory

Part three of this captivating series considers the turbulent history of Northumberland during the Middle Ages

Wandering the ruins of Mitford Castle captures an eerie sense of history at the site of what was Britain's only five-sided keep. Built in the 11th Century, it was burnt to the ground by King John in 1216. It was rebuilt in the early 14th century, only to be confiscated by Henry III and then pillaged by Robert the Bruce.

McVay visits Newminster Abbey, a Cistercian abbey near Morpeth which fell victim to the first wave of dissolution in 1537, and Hulne Priory, a home to "White Friars" near Alnwick. Hulne Priory was the filming location of Marion's home in the film Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves, and sits within Hulne Park. The park is open to the public –although it is not marketed as a visitor attraction and has no visitor facilities.

Moving on to the river gorge of the National Trust's Allen Banks, McVay muses philosophically, "when you are a traveller, the greatest point of the adventure is not knowing where you are going and that sometimes being lost can be a good thing".

The final location of this episode is Thirlwall Castle, near Hadrian's Wall. It is one of many strongholds built in the local area as part of the defence of the English Border against Scottish raids.

Hulne Priory directions

Entry is via the approach from Alnwick, and is restricted to pedestrians only with dogs not permitted. If driving, park on Ratten Row on the north-west edge of Alnwick [map]. Opening

hours are generally 11am to sunset each day, but visit the Northumberland Estates website or call the Estate Office on 01665 510777 to check other limitations. Two circular routes along permissive paths visit the abbey – Hulne Park walks map [PDF]

Thirlwall Castle directions

Turn off the A69 to Greenhead, and park near the Church [map]. An easy walk of under 2 miles is suggested by Northumberland National Park –