

= Wetheral Priory Gatehouse =

Wetheral Priory Gatehouse is a 15th @-@ century stone fortification in Wetheral , Cumbria . The priory was founded at the start of the 12th century and the gatehouse controlled the entrance to its outer courtyard . When the priory was dissolved in 1538 the gatehouse and a nearby stretch of wall were the only parts to survive . The gatehouse passed into the control of Carlisle Cathedral and became the local vicarage during the 16th and 17th centuries , before being used to store hay . Now part of a modern farm that occupies the former priory site , it is controlled by English Heritage and open to visitors . The crenellated gatehouse has three storeys , with the main entrance and porters ' lodge on the ground floor and two domestic chambers on the upper floors . English Heritage considers the building to be " the finest medieval gatehouse in Cumbria " .

= = History = =

Wetheral Priory Gatehouse was probably built in the 15th century and formed the entrance to the priory 's outer courtyard . Wetheral Priory was a small Benedictine institution , founded by Ranulf le Meschin following the Norman invasion of Cumbria at the beginning of the 12th century . The motherhouse of the priory was St Mary 's Abbey in York . The priory was known for a special right of sanctuary for criminals that had been granted to it by Henry I , allowing the priory to shelter felons who could reach the church and ring the bell there .

The gatehouse originally formed part of a range of buildings running along the side of the outer courtyard , and would have controlled access to the institution , as well as symbolising its power and status . The Anglo @-@ Scottish border was also still dangerous in the 15th century , and many monasteries in the area , like Wetheral , had protective fortifications .

By the 16th century , the priory was in decline , but its closure came as a result of the dissolution of the monasteries in England and Wales under Henry VIII . To help speed the process of closing the institution , Ralf Hartley was appointed as the prior of Wetheral by Henry 's minister , Thomas Cromwell ; royal commissioners visited in 1536 , and the priory was finally surrendered to the Crown in 1538 . The priory 's belongings were sold off or taken by Henry , depending on their value , but the lands were given to Carlisle Cathedral . Although the rest of the priory soon fell into disrepair , the gatehouse became the local vicarage ; it was still intact and in use by the minister in 1687 .

The gatehouse was later used as a hayloft . In 1978 it passed into the guardianship of the state , and is now in the care of English Heritage and open to the public . Still well preserved , it is protected under UK law as a Grade I listed building .

= = Architecture = =

English Heritage considers the building to be " the finest medieval gatehouse in Cumbria " . It closely resembles the larger fortifications at Thornton and Tynemouth abbeys , forming a three @-@ storey building built of coursed red sandstone , and now stands on the edge of the modern Wetheral Priory Farm , which occupies the site of the original priory . The gatehouse is 12 @.@ 5 by 8 @.@ 9 metres (41 by 29 ft) across , with the floors linked by a spiral staircase in the north @-@ east corner , and an adjacent barrel vaulted cellar . The marks of the range of buildings that once ran alongside the gatehouse can be seen on the external walls , and the gatehouse is topped by battlements .

The ground floor includes a barrel vaulted entrance passageway and a porters ' lodge , the latter 5 @.@ 3 by 3 metres (17 @.@ 4 by 9 @.@ 8 ft) in size . The first and second floors both formed single rooms , approximately 7 @.@ 6 by 5 @.@ 2 metres (25 by 17 ft) across internally , and would have been used as domestic chambers for the officials of the priory . They had fireplaces , garderobes and small bed chambers in the walls . The roof is predominantly built of timbers dating from between 1512 to 1536 ; the current structure was probably built around 1540 , possibly when the building was converted for use as a vicarage .

North @-@ east of the gatehouse is a 23 metres (75 ft) medieval , red sandstone wall , 2 @.@ 4

metres (7 ft 10 in) high , probably originally the east wall of the priory 's chapter house . This medieval wall had four windows running along it , with a staircase at one end .