

Lindisfarne

Berwick-upon-Tweed, Northumberland, UK

Photographs by Alan Ward 1985, 1997

Notes on the Making of the Photographs

Lindisfarne is in northern England near Scotland, on the North Sea about one mile off the coast, buffeted by the wind and only accessible at low tide. Consequently, Lindisfarne has an ephemeral quality of the land and sea, along with a surprising outcrop of rock extending one hundred feet upward from flat pasture land (1-4). The distinctive character of the land, and a grant of the property by the Northumbrian king, attracted Irish monks to establish a monastery on the tidal island in the 630s.

Lindisfarne became known as Holy Island, where a significant Christian community flourished that produced the Lindisfarne Gospels, one of the most ornate and beautifully illustrated illuminated manuscripts. The wealthy monastery thrived, until pillaged by a Viking raid in 793, the first attack on European monasteries. It was re-established about 400 years later by Benedictine monks, who rebuilt a priory over the remains of earlier buildings. Following suppression in 1536, the priory fell into ruins (4-6). Almost 900 years after the founding of the first monastery, a fortified castle was built atop the basalt rock outcrop for coastal defense in the seventeenth century, and later used as a coast guard station.

Once more abandoned by the beginning of the 20th century, the castle on this prominent landform captured the imagination of the editor of *Country Life* magazine, who proposed transforming it into a holiday home. To accomplish his vision, he engaged architect Edwin Lutyens, and later, landscape designer and Lutyens's frequent collaborator Gertrude Jekyll. Lutyens reused the principal structure, but made

strategic additions and alterations to transform the castle, while retaining the spirit of a fortified structure. Jekyll added the planting design, including a small walled garden that supplied the castle with food on the site of a former vegetable patch (11-13).

The juxtaposition of meadow, rock outcrop and tidal lands – combined with the Christian history of Monasticism in the borderlands, instills the landscape with solemn qualities. How can a set of images portray the wind-swept experience of the North Sea coast along with several layers of landscape design at this once hallowed site? The simple and austere devotional life in a monastery involves reductions, just as black and white pictures are reductions, as color can get in the way and become a distraction from describing phenomena. I aimed to portray Lindisfarne in soft atmospheric grays, as well as interpret the less tangible sense of the place. It is important to understand the dramatic location of Lindisfarne along the Northumberland coast. As shown in the first few images, it is a rather spare and open landscape, where coastal grasses show the effect of the wind, while the rock outcrop appears as an anomaly in the relatively flat coastal zone (1-3). After visiting such a dramatic site, you retain memories of what it was like, for example, to ascend the stair along the wall of the castle while it was cold, blustery and open to the elements (9). The point of view up toward the sky, with the light translated into a range of tonal values, evokes the recollection of that experience.

List of Photographs

1. Northumberland coast, 1997
2. Northumberland coast with Lindisfarne visible, 1997
3. Northumberland coast with Lindisfarne on the horizon, 1997
4. View toward rock outcrop from ruins of priory, 1997
5. Ruins of priory buildings, 1997
6. Ruins of priory, 1985
7. Approaching castle on rock outcrop, 1997
8. Castle and sheep, 1985
9. Stairs up to castle, 1985
10. View from landing over North sea, 1985
11. View back down stairs, 1985
12. View toward walled garden, 1997
13. View within walled garden, 1997
14. View within walled garden of castle, 1997
15. View of rock outcrop, 1997
16. View of rock outcrop from shoreline, 1997





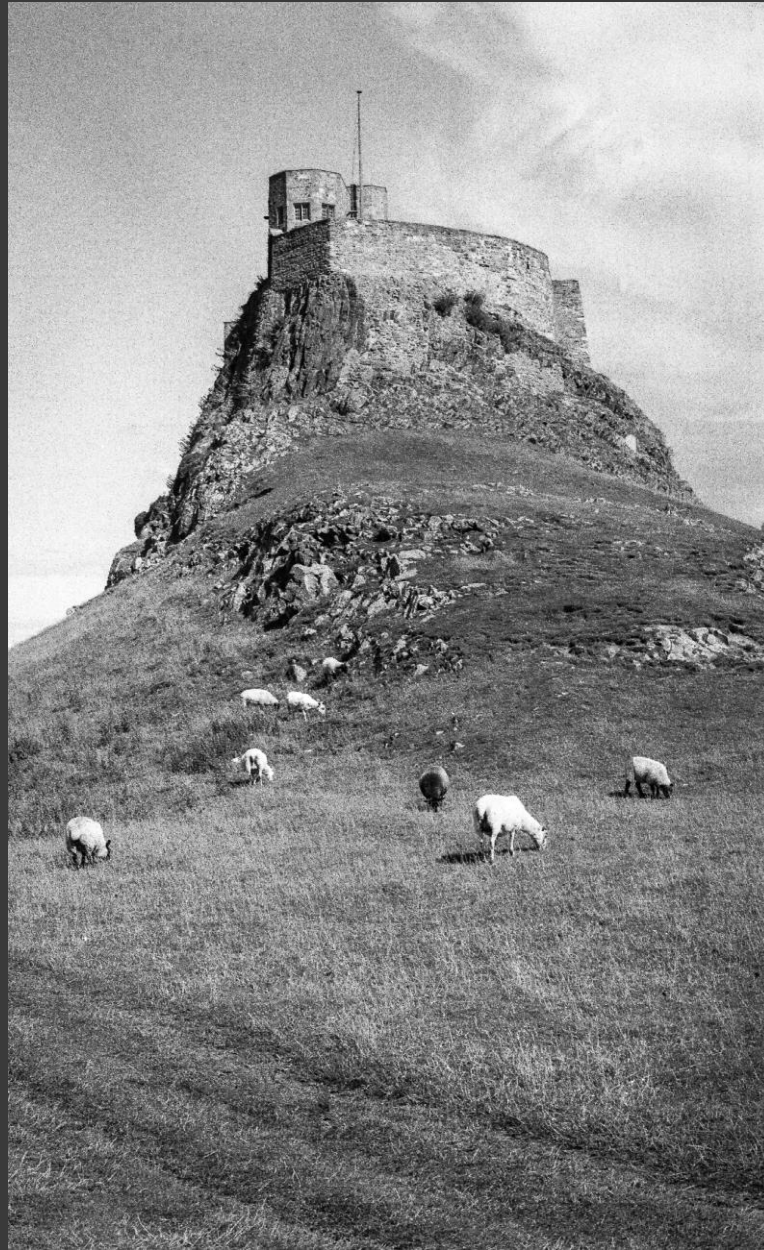




























Notes

For a more complete history see the Historic Environment Survey for
The National Trust Properties on the Northumberland Coast,
Lindisfarne, 2009