

Bronsil Castle, Eastnor,
Herefordshire.



ENGLISH HERITAGE

BRONSIL CASTLE

Eastnor, Herefordshire

**A survey of the remains of a 15th century mansion,
it's surrounding moat, and ponds.**

County: Herefordshire Unitary Authority

District: Malvern Hills

Parish: Eastnor

NGR: SO 74953721

NMR No: SO 73 NW 5

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Report and survey plan: N Smith

Other drawings: D Cunliffe

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2000 (revised 2001)

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INTRODUCTION

The site

Bronsil Castle was a moated mansion built in the 15th century by Richard, Lord Beauchamp. It survives as masonry footings and earthworks. Further earthworks of ponds and watercourses associated with it lie immediately to its east. The masonry remains of the Castle and a bridge across its moat are listed as grade II* by English Heritage, while the site as a whole is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (Hereford & Worcester No 62). It is situated within Eastnor parish, Herefordshire, at NGR SO 74953721, away from any settlement centre, the closest village being Eastnor about a mile to the west. The site lies at 115m OD, at the head of broad valley on a small tributary of the Glynch Brook, at the western foot of the Malvern Hills. Here numerous springs and streams issuing from adjacent slopes ensure a constant water supply. Midsomer Hill, crowned by its Iron Age hillfort, rises dramatically to 242m OD immediately to the east, and a spur from the main Malvern range rises to 240m OD to the north, supporting an obelisk erected in 1812.

The survey

An archaeological survey of Bronsil Castle was carried out by English Heritage in February 2000. The survey included the remains of the 'Castle' (now surviving mainly as earthworks), its surrounding moat, a complex of ponds joining it to the east and a series of water channels running through the site. The aims of the investigation were to provide an analysis of the earthworks, to produce a large-scale plan for management purposes, and to update the site record SO 73 NW 5, held by the National Monuments Record (NMR). The survey formed part of a wider programme of work started by the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England (RCHME), to investigate and record the archaeological earthworks of the Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), within which the site falls.

Geology

Silurian rocks extend along the south-western side of the Malvern Hills as far as the neighbourhood of Eastnor. Since their deposition these rocks have been affected by earth movements so that formerly horizontal beds are thrown into sharp folds and dislocated by faults (Somers Cocks 1923, 17). A series of faults extends along the western side of the valley close to Bronsil (British Geological Survey 1988) and the May Hill Sandstone also forms a conspicuous escarpment overlooking the site from the north. The geological formation underlying the site itself is Cambrian shale with igneous intrusions. Being soft rock, the Cambrian shale forms valleys. It is divided into the White Leaved Oak Shale and Bronsil Shale (Page 1908, 7; Dreghorn 1967, 171). The drift geology at Bronsil consists of Head (British Geological Survey 1988), a collection of superficial deposits probably washed down the valley from above. The soils at the site are slowly permeable, with silt over clayey soils on rock, formed from palaeozoic siltstone, shale, and mud-stone. They are seasonally water-logged and are suited to permanent grassland (Soil Survey 1983, 16). They are, however, rich, being derived from both the shale and the igneous rocks, the latter having a high iron content (Dreghorn 1967, 172).

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Very little is known about the early history of Bronsil. It is not mentioned by name in the Domesday Survey and at this time it was probably included with the manor of Eastnor, which is documented from an early date. In 830 AD Milfrith, a successor of King Offa of Mercia gave lands including Eastnor to the Church of St Mary and St Ethelburt, Hereford (later to become Hereford Cathedral). Eastnor was held by Athelstan, Bishop of Hereford, until his death in 1054. He was succeeded by Leofgar, the last Saxon Bishop of Hereford, who was killed fighting the Welsh (Somers-Cocks 1923, 46-7, 50).

The most striking characteristic of the Eastnor area at the time of the Domesday Survey was its wild and wooded nature, having ill-defined areas of manorial woodland (Smith 1964, 25). The Domesday entry for the manor of Eastnor lists it under lands belonging to the canons of Hereford and states that:

'In Astenfore are 4 hides geldable. In the demesne are 3 ploughs and 8 villeins and seven bordars with 11 ploughs. (There are) there 6 acres of meadow and 2 hayes and woodland which renders nothing and part of a salt pit in Wich. The wood is 4 furlongs in length and 2 in breadth.

Of this one knight holds half a hide and a mason half a hide and half a virgate. On the demesne 1 plough and 2 bordars with certain other men, three ploughs. Value before 1066 later and now £4' (Page 1908, 322; Somers-Cocks 1923, 72; Thorn 1983, 182a).

From this it appears that Eastnor had a sizeable area of woodland. The salt pit listed was probably at Droitwich and the rights to it are believed to have originated in the provision of fuel from Eastnor's woods (Smith 1964, 25). Although Bronsil was not listed separately, two distinct demesnes clearly already existed. It is also probable that one of the 'hayes' listed was at Bronsil and was a precursor to a later deer park.

A further documentary record for Eastnor occurs between 1186 and 1198, when the Bishop of Hereford gave lands to Little Malvern Priory, which included assarts in Eastnor called the 'Dirfau'. This deer fold clearly lay at Bronsil, since in 1469 a wood called 'Dryfawde' or 'Priors Derofold' was said to border 'one parcel of meadow formerly called Bronshill' on the north (Herefordshire Record Office AH82/16). In 1476 it was leased to Richard Beauchamp (Smith 1964, 95). This could have been the successor of the Haye mentioned above.

In 1241 Peter of Aquablanca, Bishop of Hereford, was granted free warren in his demesne lands lying outside Royal Forest. Eastnor was among these lands and throughout the medieval period it formed part of the Bishop of Hereford's Chase. The Chase bordered the Royal Forest of Malvern, which was later obtained by the Bishop's antagonist De Clare and became known as Malvern Chase. The boundary between the two chases was demarcated by the Shire Ditch or Red Earl's Dyke (NMR SO 73 NE 12). The Bishop's Chase still existed in January 1631, when the Bishop of Hereford wrote to Charles I, concerned that it be preserved. It seems, however, to have been disafforested soon after this date (Smith 1964, 151-2).

The first documentary references identified with Bronsil appear in the 13th and 14th centuries in the manuscripts of the Dean and Chapter of Hereford, when it was called *Brankswellesiche* or *Brankewallefelde(e)*, identified as 'Branoc's Spring', Branoc being a Welsh personal name, to which was added 'sic' meaning 'small stream'. Later derivations of the name include *Bremisfeld*, *Broomshill*, *Bromehill*, *Bransill*. The suffix '-felde' suggests that the area was cleared of woodland by this time (Coplestone-Crow 1989, 78).

The two major estates in Eastnor parish were well established by the 15th century. In the west of the parish was the Eastnor estate centred upon a manor house called 'Castle Ditch', the

precursor to the later Eastnor Castle (SO 73503685), while Bronsil lay in the east of the parish. It would appear that John Beauchamp owned a house at Bronsil in the early 15th century. He was Justice of South Wales, a Knight of the Garter, and eventually became Lord Treasurer of England. He was given the title 'Lord Beauchamp of Powyk', by Henry VI, in 1447 (Somers-Cocks 1923, 154; Shoemith 1996, 96). Bronsil clearly developed with the rising fortunes of the family. In 1449 licences to crenellate a mansion and to empark 300 acres were acquired by his son Richard, the second Lord Beauchamp. These were confirmed in 1460. Fields named on Moore's map of Bronsil of 1726 – 'Park Field', 'The Park', 'Shepherds Park' and 'High Park', correspond well with the size of the early park and a curvilinear boundary which may represent the former park boundary demarcates fields around Bronsil Castle (see Fig 1). Bronsil Castle lies on the western side of a further enclosure, possibly an inner park, seen on this map as a group of fields – 'Simballs meadow', 'Barn Close', 'The Tindeings' and 'Holley's Meadow'. The possible park boundary respects a further enigmatic enclosure named 'Blenhalls', indicating that it is earlier. The medieval park was incorporated into the larger Eastnor Park, which is comparatively modern and may date from the building of Eastnor Castle in 1812 (Goodbury 1999).

Not long after Bronsil Castle's construction the Beauchamp title became extinct and the family's estates were divided amongst the grand-daughters of the first lord Beauchamp (Somers-Cocks 1923, 156). Bronsil went to Margaret, who married William Reed of Lugwardine near Hereford (Somers-Cocks 1923, 156).

The reasons for the Castle's demise are not certain. It is reputed to have burned down in the Civil War (Shoemith 1996, 98), but whether this was the case or not, the Reed family soon resided at New Court, Lugwardine, an 18th-century mansion possibly with an earlier core (DOE 1985, 50).

The first depictions of Bronsil Castle appear in the 18th century, by which time it was already ruinous. An estate map of 1726 (Moore) (Fig 1) shows two buildings, one on the northern edge of the island and the other on the southern edge. The northern building has a cross on it and so may have been a chapel. The moat appears to be little different in plan from today. A pecked line running around it may represent a walkway and what may be the vestiges of an outer moat appear as ponds to the south and east of the site. There is no indication of an outer moat on its western side, where a drove-way leads from the ledbury to Tewkesbury road up onto the Malvern Hills. Access to Bronsil was by this route, which follows the course of the present drive north from 'Mill Meadow', but has a more easterly course to the south. The field name 'Mill Meadow' and a small building, almost certainly the mill, are shown downstream from Bronsil Castle. North of the moat, are two large ponds - one where a pond remains today at SO 749374 and one above it at SO 749375. Both appear to have been created by damming a stream, as is seen by banks shown across their downhill ends.

The next depiction of the site is an engraving of 1731 by Samuel and Nathaniel Buck (Fig 2). Most of the castle's exterior wall is shown standing, but there is no indication of any of the buildings shown on the earlier map. The castle appears with round angle towers on the south-west and south-east and has a gatehouse with large round towers in the centre of its western side. One curious feature is a group of four circular holes set in diamond pattern near the base of the northern gate tower. This has been interpreted as a form of gun port (Shoemith 1996, 100). An underground chamber on the island is also mentioned in the caption to the engraving. It apparently lay towards the southern side of the island (Shoemith 1996, 101). Clearly some artistic licence has been used in this portrayal of the castle. The masonry appears far more regular than surviving portions show. The lowest stages of the towers have splayed bases while there are no signs of this now, although it could be concealed by the raised water level in the moat. The ruins of the eastern range of buildings are shown as three very uniform 'humps' in the background. One notable and problematic feature is a double moat shown on the southern side of the castle, which appears to continue around the northern

and eastern sides, with the western side lost in the foreground. It is very narrow and bears little resemblance to the earthwork remains visible at the site today. The Buck brothers are known to have devoted their summer months to making drawings and their winters engraving plates for printing (Ambrose 1981, 1). It may be that the castle's surroundings, and the moat in particular, were not sketched at the time of their visit, but added to the engraving from notes.

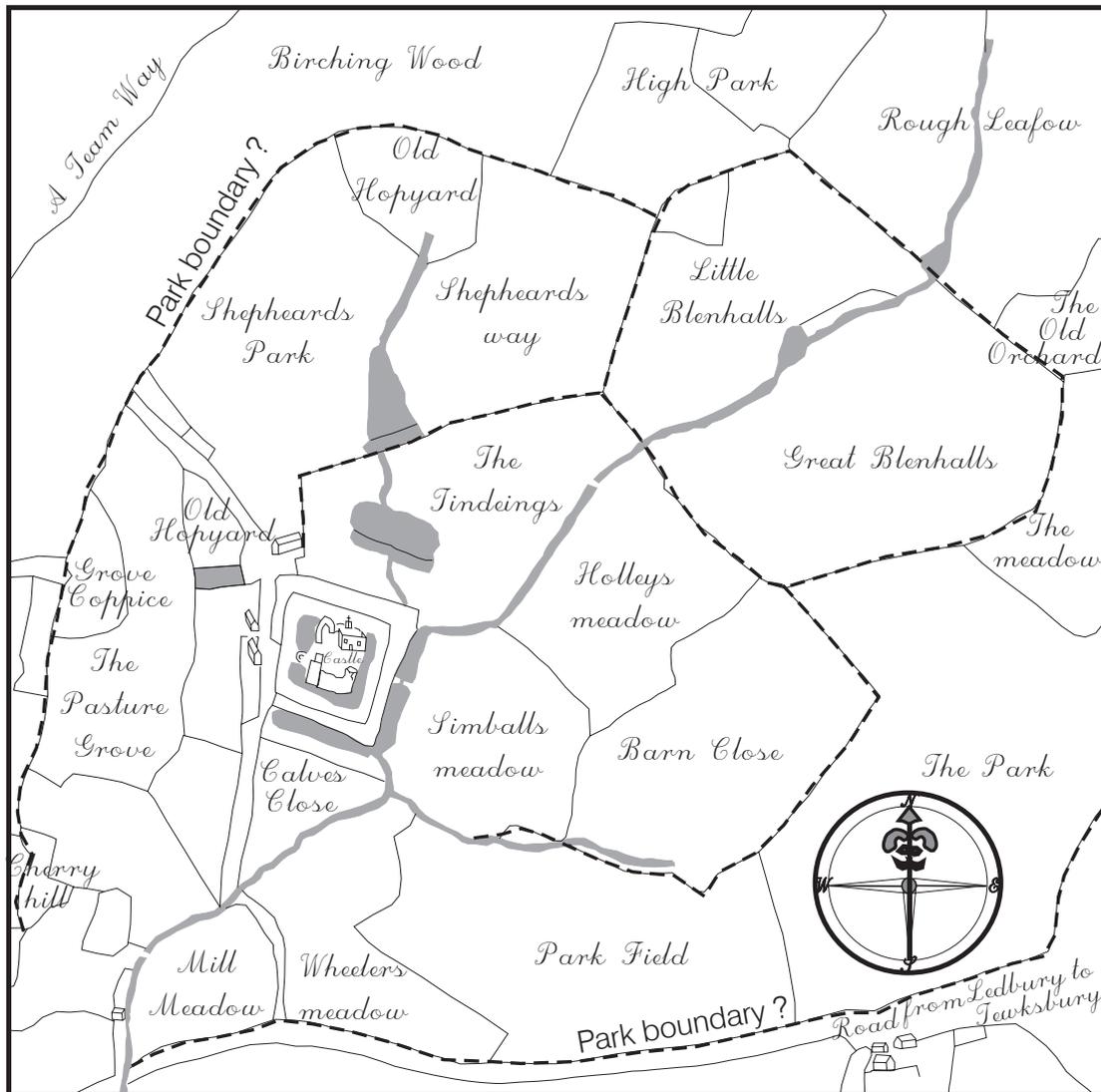
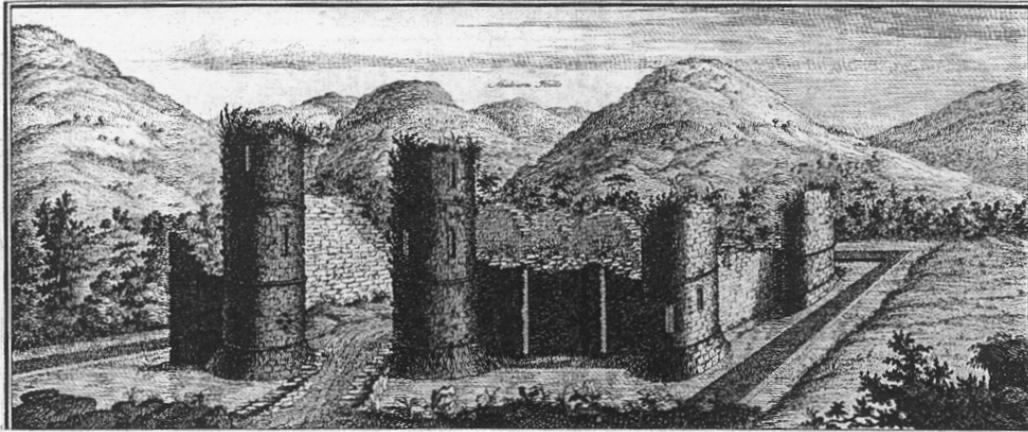


Fig 1: Drawing based on a map of Bronsil by Edward Moore, 1726.

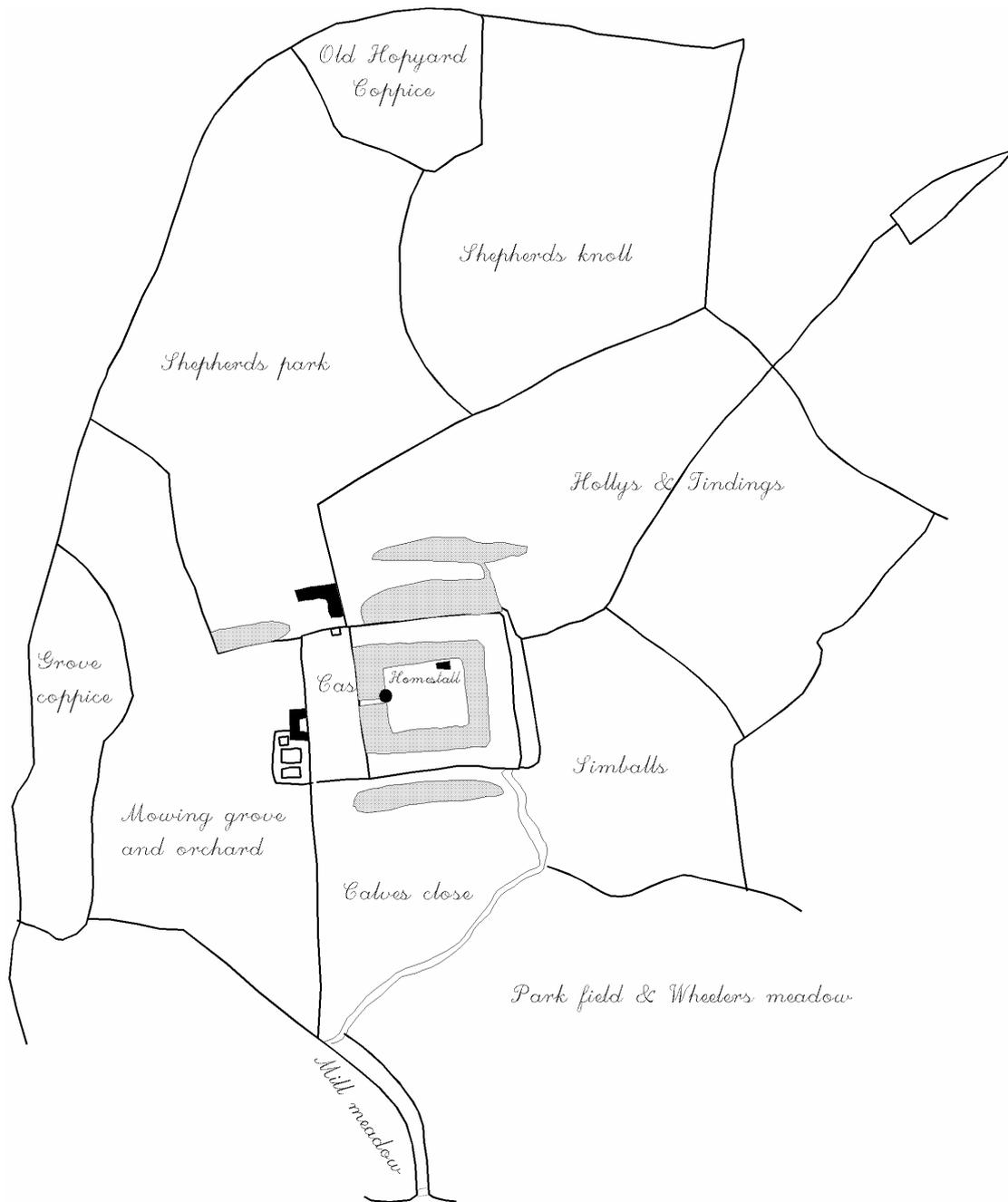
The ruinous castle was held by the Reed family until 1774, when it was sold to Thomas Somers-Cocks of Castle Ditch. The remains had been robbed for materials by 1779, when Kennion made a further drawing described, perhaps significantly, as being 'more correct' than that of the Buck brothers. He noted that only one tower was then standing, although he drew the castle as relatively complete with octagonal towers (quoted in Shoesmith 1996, 98, 100).

THE SOUTH WEST VIEW OF BRANSTILL CASTLE, IN THE COUNTY OF HEREFORD.



THIS CASTLE stands in a solitary Place at the Foot of the west side of Malvern Hills. It is encompassed by a Double Ditch, of the same form as is here represented, and appears by several circumstances in the Remains themselves as well as by other concurring Tokens to be a Place of very great Antiquity tho' we shall not pretend to determine that it is Roman. There is very lately discover'd in it, a Cavern which is not yet open'd. — Tho' Rede Esq. is the present Proprietor thereof.

Fig 2: Samuel and Nathaniel Buck's engraving of Bronsil Castle, 1731.



*Bramsill Castle in the parish of Eastnor, and county of Hereford.
 J Davis, surveyor 1808
 Property of the Rt Hon Lord somers
 Land let to Mr Lane*

Fig 3: Drawing based on Davis's plan, 1808.

By 1808, when a further estate map was produced (Fig 3), the eastern ponds were dry and water had collected north of the moat's retaining bank, possibly within the relict northern arm of the outer moat. The water supply to the moat continued to be from channels in its north-eastern corner, and the outflow continued to be from its south-western corner. A building shown outside the north-western corner of the moat by Moore was still standing in 1808, but

by this time the island had very few buildings remaining. The only structures were a small building on the northern edge of the island, named 'homestall', and a circular feature on the western side named 'castle'. This stood in the position of the castle's northern gate tower. It is perfectly situated within full view of a house, which has appeared for the first time to the west of the moat, indicating that it may have been rebuilt as a romantic ruin. The new house must have either replaced the two buildings shown here by Moore, or have partly incorporated one or both of them as part of its fabric. It comprises a main range fronting the moat with side wings projecting forward from each end. The rustic stone bridge, visible in its present position and it may also date from this period.

By 1869 only the bridge and the, probably reconstructed, gatehouse tower are shown in a sketch by Robinson. A double moat is still described. Beginnings of tree and scrub colonisation of the site are evident in the illustration.

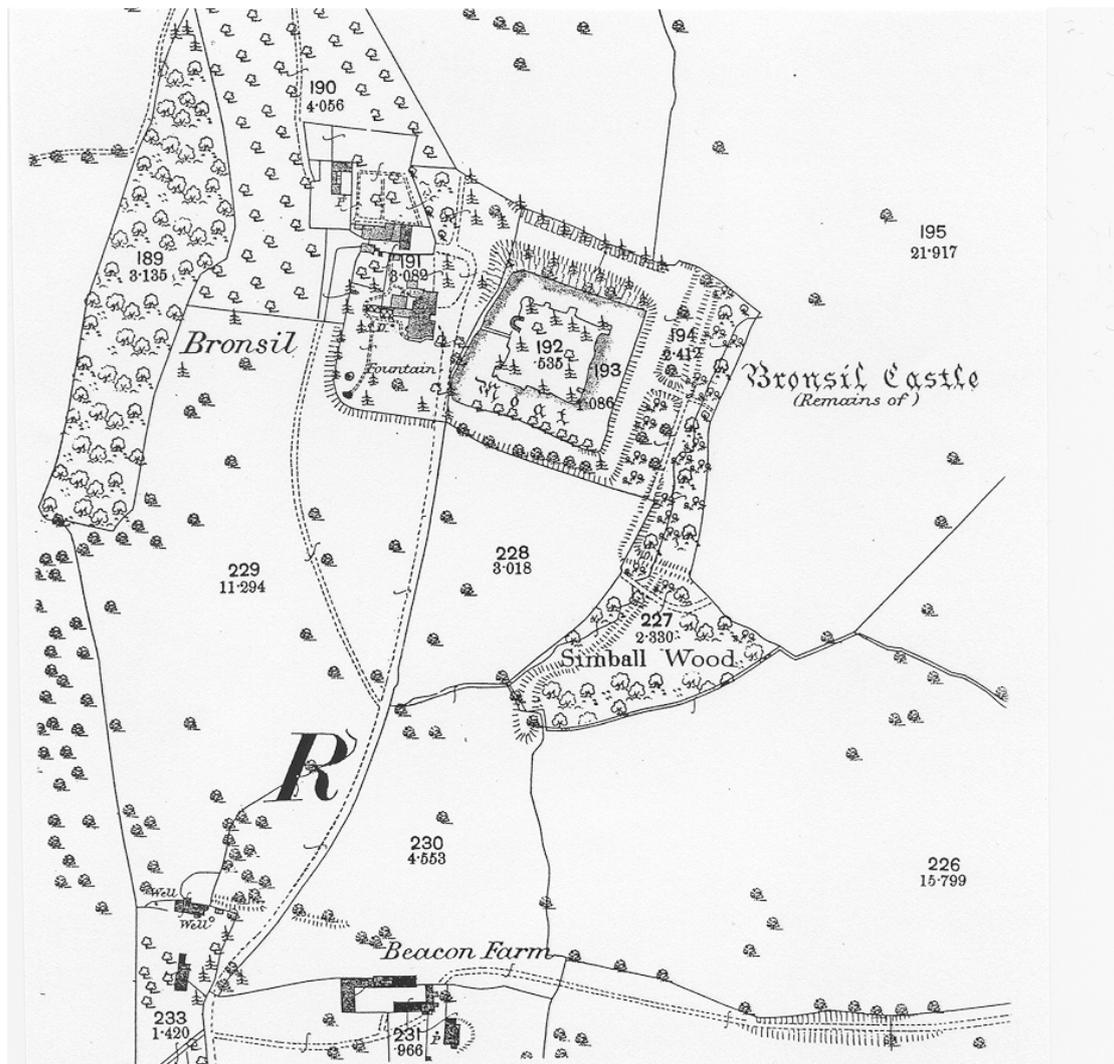


Fig 4: OS 25" map, 1889 (surveyed 1886).

On the Ordnance Survey 1st edition 25" map of 1889 (Fig 4), a few changes to the site are visible. The south-western corner of the moat seems to have been enlarged, but this difference in depiction may be purely because this OS survey was more accurate than the previous surveys. The house beside the moat has been enlarged and a complex of outbuildings and yards has been constructed to its north. The area east of the moat has become wooded. Two

major channels carry water through the former ponds to the east of the moat, and a new driveway to the house cuts through the former millpond and its dam to the south of the site.

PREVIOUS ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORK

Bronsil has attracted little archaeological attention and has never been the subject of significant archaeological excavation. It is known that in about 1840, when the moat was cleaned out, some weapons and 'many other things' were found, particularly 'buckles of great size' and 'oddly shaped spoons'. The whereabouts of these finds now is unknown. It was also said that prior to the reign of Queen Victoria small cannon balls picked up in the neighbourhood, which the people called "Oliver's Pills", could be seen in some of the cottages in the vicinity (Piper 1880). This may lend some support to the theory that Bronsil was the site of a Civil War siege.

A small-scale earthwork survey of Bronsil Castle was carried out by the RCHM for the county inventory of Herefordshire (RCHM 1932, xxvi). When the RCHM investigators visited the site there was little more remaining of the castle than what is visible today, and the condition of the ruins was described as 'bad'. However, their plan does indicate that the lower part of the castle's curtain wall was intact on its southern and western sides. At the foot of the wall of the northern gate tower was a circular hole thought to be a drain, and it was noted that the structure of the tower was of two builds, the inner being earlier in date. Earthwork indications of the possible outer moat were also surveyed.

The most recent study of the site has been by Ron Shoesmith of the Hereford Archaeological Unit. He produced an account of the site's history and a 1:2000 scale plan, also showing indications of the outer moat (Shoesmith 1996). A further account by Shoesmith is awaiting publication (Shoesmith forthcoming).

The only excavation to have taken place at Bronsil Castle took the form of an archaeological investigation of shallow excavations for scaffolding against the gatehouse tower. This took place in 1990, when the tower was in a state of imminent collapse. No significant archaeological levels were encountered, but a photographic record was made of the tower. Most of the tower unfortunately fell into the moat before the scaffolding could be erected. A detailed survey of the surviving masonry footings was made by the Hereford Archaeological Unit, under the direction of Shoesmith (Morris 1990)

THE EARTHWORKS

Reference letters in the text all refer to the plan, Fig 5.

The Moat

The moat is a substantial earthwork, wider than the average medieval moat. It was not possible to examine its profile since it is still water-filled, but it appears to be of a considerable depth and its profile is almost certainly of the U-shape generally found in medieval moats. It is roughly square in plan and of no great extent, enclosing only 0.51 acres, an average area for a medieval homestead. The moat has been constructed by damming water across a valley, and hence the southern, down-slope, arm is greater than the others and its retaining bank stands *c*2.5m high.

The moat is retained on two other sides, the north and east, by broad flat-topped banks. The eastern bank is a substantial feature, rising up to 3m from the bottom of adjacent ponds. The northern bank is slighter, but still stands up to 1.6m above the external ground level. On all three sides this retaining bank or dam stands above the level of the island. On the remaining side, the west, there is no indication of an outer retaining bank, the moat here being simply defined by its ditch. It is possible, however, that this side of the moat was once also retained by a bank, and that it has been obliterated by later activity. The earthwork evidence also suggests that the retaining bank once continued westwards. At (a) and (b) on the survey plan, its southern and northern sections are truncated by the driveway to the house and a car parking area, while the south-western corner of the moat in particular seems to have suffered much disturbance, having a clean-cut, yet shallow, profile of recent appearance. Indeed, a good deal of landscaping probably took place for the succession of buildings and gardens to the west of the moat.

Slight depressions in the retaining bank, visible in several places, may mark the positions of former sluices. At (c), a 1.5m deep depression in the outer side of the moat is in line with a shallow depression (d) in the bank, which in turn is aligned with a water course (e). This may represent a former inlet for water supplying the moat. At the south-eastern corner of the moat are two shallow depressions across the bank, one of which (f) follows the line of the current outflow pipe and sluice, and the other (g) may represent a former outlet or overflow channel. The present system of filling the moat is from a culvert feeding into its north-eastern corner. This is linked to a system of channels connected with field drains and natural springs.

To the north of the moat, and parallel with it, is an outer, lesser feature (h), possibly the remains of the outer moat indicated by documentary sources. This is now partially overlain by a dirt track way for vehicle access, but is still water-filled in places. Its eastern end connects with the pond complex and it clearly once continued further to the west also, but it is overlain by the gravelled car parking area. The two dry ponds to the east of the moat may represent its eastern arm. No earthwork remains of an outer moat could be traced on the southern side.

The Island

The island is low-lying, its edge only an average of about 1.2m above the present water surface, and parts of its interior being barely above the water level. In some parts the curtain wall of the castle survives (i), while elsewhere (j) its tumbled remains skirt the island. Although stone robbing has reduced the castle to little more than an earthwork, a few fragments of masonry survive. The largest is part of the gatehouse's northern tower (k) (Fig 6) which, as described above (p7) could well have been altered by later rebuilding. The circular drain hole noted near its base in earlier accounts is no longer in situ, but its ashlar blocks lie on the ground. The tower is clearly of two builds, with the outer being later. Until

major collapses in 1979 or 1980 and 1990 (Morris 1990) much more of it survived. A photograph, taken in 1990 (Shoemith 1996, 97), shows it standing more than two string courses high.



Fig 6: Remains of the northern gate tower, 2000.

The other masonry remains of Bronsil Castle are less substantial. At (l) faced masonry standing $c1.3\text{m}$ high represents the remains of a wall running parallel with the moat's edge. At the north-eastern corner of the island the wall of the corner tower is still intact and visible rising for approximately 1.2m above the present water level (Fig 7). Along the northern side of the island small sections of faced masonry (m) protrude from a largely rubble bank. These mark the line of a wall running parallel with the edge of the island. At the north-eastern corner are the remains of a newel staircase (n) (Fig 8), while in the centre of the island are two further walls (o). These masonry remains are all of Devonian Red Sandstone, which are the predominant surface rocks of Herefordshire and provide the stone for many of its castles.



Fig 7: Footings of the curtain wall of the north-eastern tower



Fig 8: Remains of a newel staircase (n on Fig 5)

In addition to masonry fragments, the island contains earthwork features. The positions of the castle's angle towers and intermediate towers survive as earthwork platforms (p). These are present on all but the south-eastern corner of the island, where there may never have been a projecting tower (Butcher 1985, 10). Banks varying in height from 1.4m externally to 0.7m high internally also surround much of its perimeter. Some of the masonry described above protrudes from these banks which clearly represent the footings of buildings around the edge of the island. Further banks in the interior define at least two sub-rectangular depressions (q) almost certainly marking the positions of former buildings. These are now very waterlogged, but the present level of water in the moat may be higher than it was intended to be. This was said to be the case in 1985 (*ibid*, 10). The centre of the island is dominated by two amorphous mounds (r) standing up to 2.5m high. These appear to be heaps of rubble from demolished or collapsed buildings.

As with most moats, the position of the original access way to the island is not clear. It may be that it was across the western side where the present bridge lies. However, the only side of the island where there are no breaks in the earthworks is the southern. On the northern side there is a very suggestive break in the building footings and Butcher (*ibid*, 10) suggests that there was a minor second entrance or 'water-gate' here, possibly approached by a wooden bridge. On the eastern side of the island there is also a, possibly significant, alignment between a break in the bank around the moat's edge (s), two parallel wall footings (o) and the dam at the head of the northern pond (t), which may have served as a walkway. These could also delineate a former access route reflected in Moore's map.

The ponds

Adjoining the moat to its east is a line of five ponds. These descend along the valley side. They appear as a series of stews feeding each other so that the water of each upper pond was let into the lower in turn. A ditch cut along their side (u) probably allowed some of them to be emptied without disturbing the rest. All the ponds are dry now and the watercourses which once fed them are carried by channels through the pond beds and dams.

The northern pond (A) is sub-rectangular and elongated in plan. It is clearly defined on all sides. Its western side is now formed by the moat's retaining bank, which rises 3m above the bottom of the pond. Its southern side is defined by a substantial dam standing 3.5m high above the bottom of pond (B), and 1.8m deep internally. This dam overlies the northern end of pond (B), while a break of slope (v) indicates that the retaining bank of the moat has been heightened, so covering the original western sides of ponds (A) and (B). No indications of any former inlet sluice to pond (A) were seen, but it must have been in the northern side. The obvious place for any outflow from this pond is where a channel now cuts the dam, and this was probably the position of the original sluice.

Pond (B) is also sub-rectangular in plan. Like pond (A), its western side is now defined by the retaining bank of the moat, which rises to c3.8m above the bottom of the pond at its greatest depth. It is denuded on its eastern side, with only a slight bank remaining, overlain by the dam of pond (A) above and by the northern bank of pond (C) below. The southern end of the pond survives as a bank standing 1m high internally. This is again overlain by the south-eastern corner of the moat's retaining bank. Water is carried through pond (B) by channels, but its southern end remains waterlogged. An inner scarp (w) within this pond, on the same alignment as a spur within pond (A) at (x), may represent the north-western corner of a pond pre-dating pond (B). Alternatively, the scarp can be projected northwards where it aligns with bank (x) and channel (h) to form a narrow channel, thus providing good evidence to support the idea of an outer moat, as indicated by documentary sources.

Pond (C) has been dug into the hillside and so has steep scarps on its eastern side, a bank on its northern side and dams on its southern and western sides. It is of a less regular plan than ponds (A) and (B), having a slightly trapezoidal shape, wider at its southern, lower, end. It is well-defined on all sides, on the northern bank measures 1.5m high internally. The southern dam is 2.1m high, which continues on its western side. It is out of line with ponds (A) and (B), suggesting that it was an afterthought, and the fact that its north-western corner overlies the south-eastern corner of pond (B) confirms this. Water is currently fed through the pond by three channels which converge there - one from the moat, via pond (B), one (u) which by-passes the ponds above and a contour-following channel (y), which runs above the pond and parallel to it. A breach has been made through the head of this pond to carry away the water from these three channels. A further slight earthwork in pond (C), a break of slope on its eastern side, possibly marks an old water level.

A small sub-rectangular pond, pond (D), lies below pond (C). Its eastern side is defined by a bank 1m high and its western side by a bank 1.1m high externally. Its northern side is overlain by a track-way and the outflow channel from pond (C) also cuts it here. At its head, or southern side, is a dam 2.1m high breached by the out-flow channel.

Pond (E), which appears to have been larger than those discussed above, was only surveyed in part and does not survive in its entirety. It is on a slightly different alignment to the others described, is different in nature and appears to have been fed from a different watercourse. Its north-western side is defined by a spread bank, while the head of the pond is a dam 2m high, which would have held a considerable amount of water. The remainder of the pond has been obliterated by a track-way forming the boundary of the survey, but vague scarps beyond may mark its former continuation. It is possible that this pond may have powered a mill and waterwheel, probably located on or just below the dam. A break in the western side of this pond and a channel running parallel to its western side may represent by-pass routes for water when the mill was not in use. A mill at Bronsil is mentioned in a deed of 1569 (Shoemith 1996, 101)

The ponds contemporary with various phases of the moat would have functioned as by-pass routes for water when the moat was being cleaned out, and as an overflow for the moat. The pond complex was clearly more extensive than it now appears. It is probable that it extended further to the south and formed header ponds for a predecessor to a mill shown on the estate map of 1726 at SO 74773689. Today a house named Mill House stands at this location.

The watercourses

Bronsil Castle was sited at a confluence of watercourses flowing down from the Malvern Hills, which provided an ample water supply for the moat and ponds. Today water gathers above the moat's northern side, where the original water inlet was probably situated. South of the moat linear earthworks (z) leading towards the present stream may represent a southern continuation of the original stream across which the moat's dam was constructed. It appears that the stream has been diverted to a more easterly course and canalised along the valley side and through the ponds, while the moat was built up over the valley bottom.

Another source of water lies to the north-east of the site. Here springs and field drains have been channelled and feed into the moat via a culvert. Water is now carried through the dry pond beds by a cleanly-cut system of channels. These comprise a major channel which by-passes ponds (A), (B) and (E) but cuts through ponds (C) and (D). A small channel (y) also runs above the eastern side of pond (C), entering the pond behind its dam. Pond (E) is cut by a lesser channel flowing from the east. The moat drains or overflows into the major channel, which resumes its natural course to the south of the site. The remains of many further channels cut through pond (E), some of which are now dry. These are of V-shaped in profile,

c1.3m deep, and appear once to have continued further north, but have been truncated by a track-way.

Summary

The relative sequence of earthworks at Bronsil Castle can be summarised as follows. A moat was created and filled by damming a valley stream. It probably defended an early timber mansion. A series of fishponds by-passing the moat was later added, the stream being diverted from its original course and around the moat to feed them. The relict stream channel can be seen as earthworks (e) and (z). A stone mansion was built on the island under licence to crenellate in the 15th century. Ponds (D) and (E) pre-date pond (C) and may belong to this early period. At some stage, perhaps when the stone mansion was built, an outer moat separated from the present moat by a raised walkway, was constructed. This appears in 18th-century documents but it has largely disappeared. Earthworks (x) and (w) may represent its outer edge. Some of the early ponds were probably remodelled to form the eastern arm of the outer moat. When the outer moat fell out of use part of its eastern arm appears to have reverted to use as pond (A), the dam of which overlies (B) and (w). A further pond (C), with a similarly sharp profile, was probably created at the same time. This also overlies (B) and possibly (D) below. Earthwork evidence that the walkway was probably heightened at a later date can be seen in scarps (v) and the south-western corner of the moats retaining dam, which overlies (B).

The earthwork evidence suggests that Bronsil Castle's remains have been the subject of much alteration during the post medieval period. If the outer moat ever had a western arm, it was filled in prior to 1726. Its southern arm was also obliterated at a more recent date. Any dam retaining the outer moat here would have needed to have been level with the inner moat if Bucks' illustration - showing both moats at the same level - is accurate. This would mean major landscaping must have taken place to raise the inner moat's dam, which now stands 3m high, and to level the outer moat completely. During the 19th century a landscape park was laid out around the new mansion house beside the moat. The site then seems to have been the subject of alterations. Later ponds (A) and (C) may have been used for duck-rearing in the 19th century. Some further levelling of earthworks may have taken place when the immediate surrounds of the moat were used for fruit growing in the 1970s.

DISCUSSION

The origins of settlement at Bronsil are unknown, but there were two major landholdings in Eastnor parish by 1086. There was almost certainly a dwelling at Bronsil prior to the 15th-century licence to crenellate and the construction of Bronsil Castle. The earthwork relationship between the moat and ponds suggests an early date for such a dwelling. Associations between moats and ponds such as those found at Bronsil are commonly seen. In a study of moats in the adjoining county of Worcestershire, Bond (1978, 76) found that at least twenty-four examples had fishponds attached to them. Given the common associations between medieval ponds and moats, and the fact that the ponds appear to represent a diversion of water to by-pass the moat, it is further probable that the moat also existed from an early period. The probable existence of a pre-Domesday park or 'haye' at Bronsil and its later inclusion within the Bishop of Hereford's Chase, make it possible that an early hunting lodge belonging to the Bishop was situated there. It is known that John, the 1st Lord Beauchamp, lived at Bronsil prior to the licences to crenellate (above p3). An isolated dwelling in a wooded location, owned by such a leading figure, is likely to have been moated for security as well as for prestige and display.

Early settlement at Bronsil could have resulted from woodland colonisation, creating a secondary estate on the periphery of Eastnor parish sometime prior to 1086. Most excavated moats originated in the period 1180-1320 (Lewis *et al* 1997, 133). They are common in woodland areas of later colonisation where impervious clay soils, which were difficult to plough, provided wood pasture and good water retention. Such landscapes include the Welsh borders. Bond has noted a relationship in the distribution of moated sites within the medieval extent of the Forest of Feckenham and the neighbouring Malvern Chase, where assarting was rife in the 12th and 13th centuries (Bond 1978, 73).

After about 1325 a general decline in use and adaptation of homestead moats to other uses took place. From 1500 onwards destruction and adaptive revival meant that moats very similar to earlier structures were built, but had different functions, notably within landscape gardens. Medieval moats were occasionally adapted to these new uses, concealing their original nature (Le Patourel & Roberts 1978, 46). The earthwork complex at Bronsil probably represents such a re-modelling of earlier features.

The ponds at Bronsil also probably originated in the medieval period. Fish was an important part of the medieval diet, as water and airborne creatures were favoured for their purity above terrestrial livestock. Sea fish and eels were commonly eaten and river fish such as pike, bream, perch and roach were bred to enhance the diet of the wealthy. Fish ponds were often sited in parks for security against poachers. Some of the earliest ponds at Bronsil could have served as small storage ponds from which fish could be caught easily. Ponds and water features were also decorative features in the landscape, as demonstrated at many late medieval high status sites, and they may have had a decorative function at earlier dates.

Following the death of John Beauchamp, his son Richard succeeded to the title and estate at Bronsil (Somers-Cocks 1923, 155). He has been described (Whitehead 1995, 201) as '*a member of the privileged coterie associated with the Yorkist ascendancy of Edward IV which stimulated a Renaissance of chivalric culture*'. His status demanded a '*flamboyant structure with a full compliment of knightly symbols*'. In keeping with this description, Richard procured the licences to crenellate and empark. He had a new house built within the moat, which was the substantial, with crenellations, imposing gatehouses and towers. It had the appearance and name, if not the strategic location and defensive capability, of a castle. The impression of Bronsil at this time is of a showpiece castle with an imposing gatehouse, a theatrical backdrop for chivalric fantasies (Shoemith 1996, 102). Although Bronsil Castle was not sited in any position of strategic importance, and could be overlooked on most sides

from the higher ground surrounding it, its wide moat and substantial walls could offer some protection when necessary, as may have the case been during the Civil War.

To enhance the surroundings of this new castle elaborate water gardens were laid out. As part of this new construction an outer moat was added and ponds were created with water perhaps cascading from one to another. The centrepiece was the 'castle' itself, a quadrangular arrangement of buildings around a courtyard, the outer walls rising sheer from the waters of the moat. The castle and its setting were viewed from raised walkways, which today appear as the broad flat-topped retaining bank, then lying between the two moats (Fig 9). Further walkways probably meandered amongst the ponds, perhaps following the course of their banks. The garden was also intended to be outward looking, with the raised walkways giving views out to the surrounding countryside and taking full advantage of the site's spectacular setting at the foot of the Malvern Hills. It has further been suggested (Whitehead 1997, 202) that the area outside the gatehouse could have been used for tournaments. This area appears to have been substantially altered since medieval times, having been the site of a buildings since at least the 18th century.



Fig 9: A raised walkway surrounding the moat

Concentric double moats such as that at Bronsil are a rare form of earthwork, but similar remains can be seen at Kenilworth Castle, Warwickshire (SP 27 SE 11). In around 1414 Henry V erected a pavilion known as the 'Pleasaunce', which comprised a banqueting hall surrounded by a double moat. Strensham Castle, Worcestershire (SO 94 SW 6), also bears striking similarities to Bronsil and has a concentric double moat of roughly the same size. As at Bronsil, a number of rectangular hollows and lines of former stone walls are visible. At Strensham a licence to crenellate was obtained in 1388 and the castle, like Bronsil, is said to have been destroyed during the Civil War. The topographic location of Strensham Castle, being overlooked, argues against a military origin and the earthworks visible are believed to have been created as part of an ornamental remodelling of the earlier castle in combination with three ponds to the east (Cocroft 1989).

Analytical fieldwork on garden remains has identified the previously unknown garden type into which class Bronsil falls. This is the medieval designed landscape. Such landscapes are characteristically areas of land modified by the construction of lakes, ponds, embankments and drives. Most, like Bronsil, are based on an earlier park or had a park constructed as part of their arrangement. Many are associated with castles in name, form, and pretension. Approach is an important factor in their designs, often involving the manipulation of water to surround, reflect, support imagery and sustain fish and birds. They have a close integration with their built element and the capacity to surprise, delight, or to create an image (Everson 1998, 32-3). Creation of external viewpoints from which the designed landscape could be advantageously seen was important and it is likely that Bronsil was viewed from vantage points on the surrounding hills, possibly even from a platform of the type found at Bodiam Castle (Everson 1998, 32). Older medieval traditions continued in the form of fish ponds, which were identical to earlier fishponds apart from the fact that they had surrounding walkways. Such ornamental landscapes, apart from giving pleasure to the viewer, were used for grazing, arable, hunting, boating, fishing and to drive mills. Symbolism and imagery were important factors in their design and they were markers of status for their creators, a large proportion of whom, like the Beauchamps, had recently risen or were about to rise in status (Taylor 2000, 47-51).

SURVEY METHOD

The survey was carried out in February 2000. Survey control was established using a Wild TC 1610 Total Station Theodolite and the survey data was processed using Key Terra Firma software. The archaeological detail was recorded manually, at 1:500 and 1:1000 scale, by taped offsets. Archive material for the survey has been deposited in the National Monuments Record.

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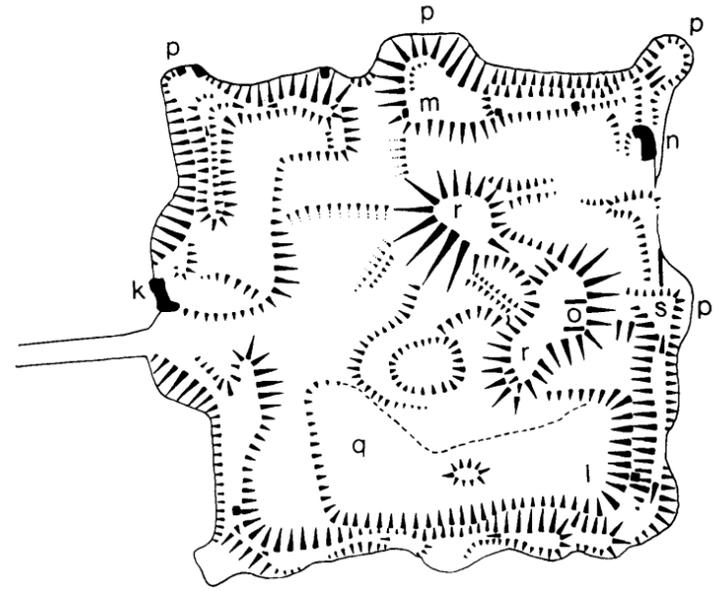
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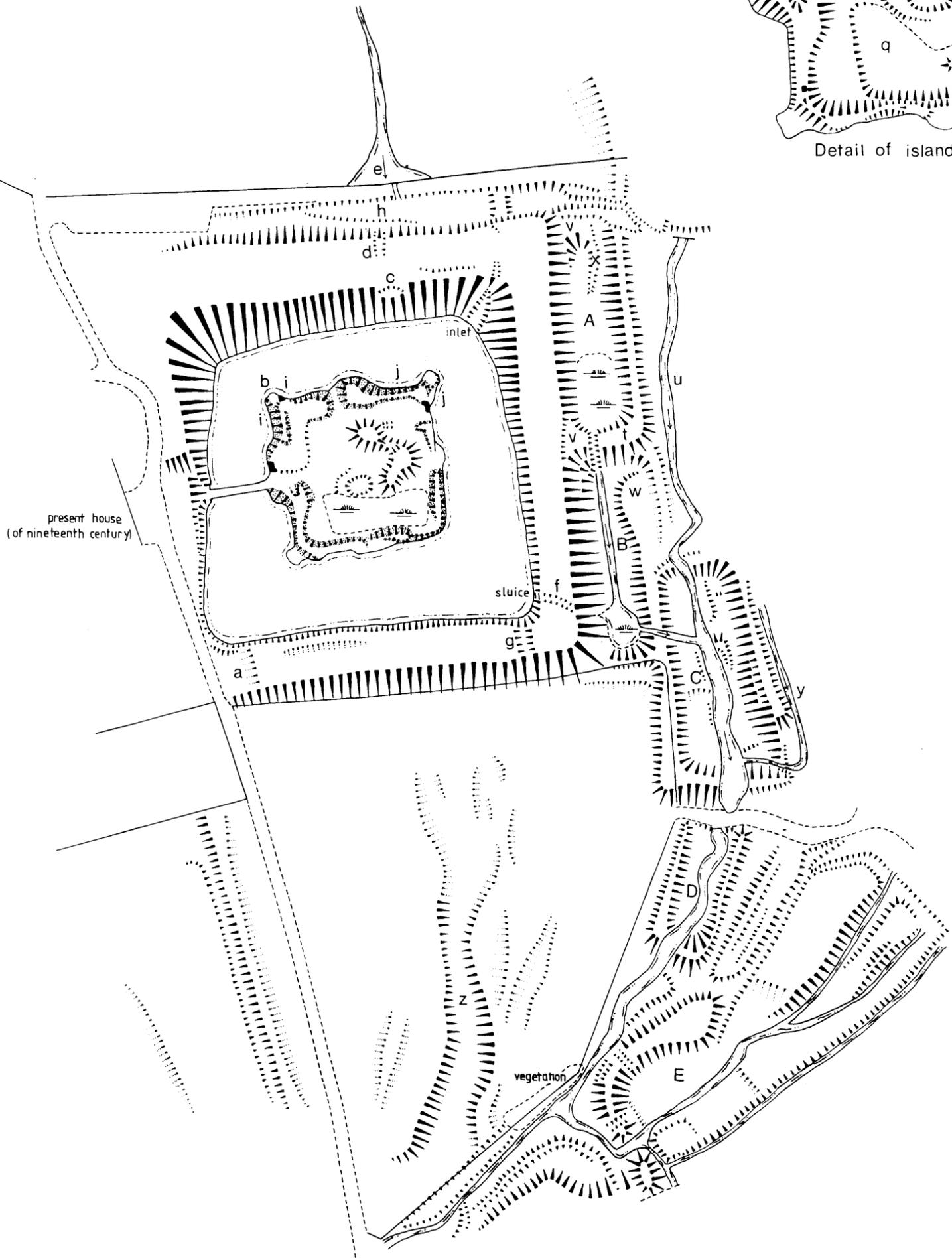
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Detail of island



present house
(of nineteenth century)

vegetation



Fig 5: Bronsil Castle, English Heritage survey 2000.