

Castle Yard

A medieval ringwork

National Grid Reference TM40297346

National Monument Number 30525

Some statistics. Diameter of ring – approximately 83 metres. Area of 0.4 hectares.
E.H. figures Platform - raised about .6 metre above surrounding ground.
Ditch – up to 7 metres in width. ¹



Castle – where is the castle?

Although this earthwork has been labelled ‘Castle’ there was never a stone castle as in the popular idea of a castle. It is a medieval or possibly Saxon ringwork which may have had an inner bank topped with a timber palisade encircling the enclosure.

There is no mention of the word ‘castle’ in any of the manorial documents and it does not appear until 1745 in an estate map². The area from Hall Wood to the castle was wood or wood pasture and may have obscured the feature.

The long causeway type earthwork (running north-westwards away from the ring) is the remains of a boundary possibly forming the contained land of a bailey, an area for grazing.

Why is it here?

The position is a commanding one overlooking the important kings highway from Bury St Edmunds to Dunwich and the Sibton road which led from Yoxford. It may have been here in Manni Swart’s (pre 1066) time or it could have been an illegal ‘castle’ built during the troubled times of Danish incursions or the civil war between Matilda and Stephen in the 1140’s.

Who lived here?

Before 1066 the manor of Bramfield was in the hands of Manni Swart³, an Anglo-Saxon Danish thane i.e. a substantial landholder with duties in the king’s service, having a church, a kitchen, a bell-house and **a fortified dwelling-place**⁴. After 1066 these holdings were ceded by the king to Alan, Count of Richmond and subsequently leased to a family who took the name de Bramfield. The ringwork was probably the domestic site of the de Bramfield family. From a 15th century extent of Bramfield manor⁵ it is possible to get a picture of the buildings that might have been within the circle – a capital house or hall with chambers annexed, a dovecote, stables and a grange round a

¹ Department for Culture, Media and Sport Ref: AA 43511/1

² Rabett Estate Map 1745 HD 42/1 S.R.O.I.

³ Domesday Survey ed. Mrs Susan Morris 1986 Vol. 1 p.292b

⁴ Anglo Saxon England Sir Frank Stenton O.U.P. 1971 p.487

⁵ HB26 371.1 S.R.O.I.

courtyard (n.b. no domestic chapel). There was to be right of way to the Lord's pound and free access to the hall for the Lord to hold courts there as often as he needs.

Eudo de Bramfield certainly gave the church (*ecclesium meum* = my church) that is St Andrew's to Blythburgh Priory before 1160⁶ so it seems his family or a steward, may have been living here. So far only one piece of medieval pottery has been found in the ditch and as it is a scheduled monument it may be impossible to mount an archaeological dig. Much pottery has been found at the bottom of the hill.

⁶ Blythburgh Cartulary ed. Christopher Harper-Bill Vol.1p.88