

A MEDIEVAL EARTHWORK AT BINSTED, NEAR ALTON

Abstract

The possible site of the medieval manor of Bullinghurst is described and discussed. Evidence for its possible use during the Civil War is also presented.

The Site

There is a substantial sub-rectangular raised platform on the south side of Binsted Street opposite River Hill Farm (SU 788 410) (Fig 1, no 4). It can be subdivided into three basic parts (Fig 3).

A. A pear-shaped natural hump, 90.00 by 52.50m, at the north end, bounded by the deep cutting of Binsted Street on the north and with a rectangular flattened area, 22.50 by 40.00m, on the top. There are also indications of a silted-up ditch on the east, south and west sides of this 'motte'. This has been partly obscured by the construction of earthworks to the south.

An air photograph taken of the site by the author shows a light square on the top of the 'motte' which may mark the site of the main building. Access to the top was by means of an ascending terrace up the side of the road cutting. The whole of the site used to be wooded but is now grassed over. A mole-cast has yielded a fragment of sandy oxidised medieval cooking pot within the light-coloured square.

B. A trapezoidal platform to the south of the 'motte' measuring 110.00 by 87.80m. This has a bowed east side and indications of a tower site at the south-east corner. There are no certain indications of an enclosing ditch except possibly along the south side. Equally, there are few traces of an enclosing bank along the edge of the platform except at the south-east corner adjacent to the base of the suspected tower. The average elevation of the eastern edge of the earthwork is c. 1 m. Its elevation averages 1m on the east, downhill side. It

appears to overlay and partially destroy a slight earlier feature which shows up a semi-circular length of ditch of irregular width cut by the eastern edge of C. The air photograph mentioned above shows what may be very faint traces of ravelins at the south-east and north-east corners, and a bastion in the centre of the east side. There are also further very faint traces suggestive of levelled mudwork ravelins and a bastion on the eastern side of B, but nothing is visible of any of these from the ground.

Discussion

The earthwork is almost certainly the site of the medieval manor of Bullinghurst. The perambulation of Alice Holt forest made in 1301 passes along the east side of it and at this point is described as running along the 'edge of the hill as far as the capital curtilage of John of Binsted and so by the hedge on the east side of the Scharstrete' (HRO 23M49/1).

The manor of Bullinghurst was a very late foundation and a good example of extreme subinfeudation. The whole of Binsted lay within the great royal manor of Alton Westbrook at this time, along with Kingsley, much of East Worldham and northern Headley. In Binsted were a number of freeholdings, some of which paid feudal service direct to the court at Alton. Others, however, paid such services to subsidiary manors; those of Westcot, South Hay, Thurstons, Binsted Popham, Droxfords and Millcourt. The lords of these manors in turn paid their services to the Alton court (BM Add. Roll 27820).

When Edward I founded his new royal manor of Womer on the wastes north of the pond of that name in 1285, he spent a good deal of his time there. John of Binsted, described as a king's clerk, underwent a meteoric rise in fortune from this time, and carved out a manor for himself, formed from

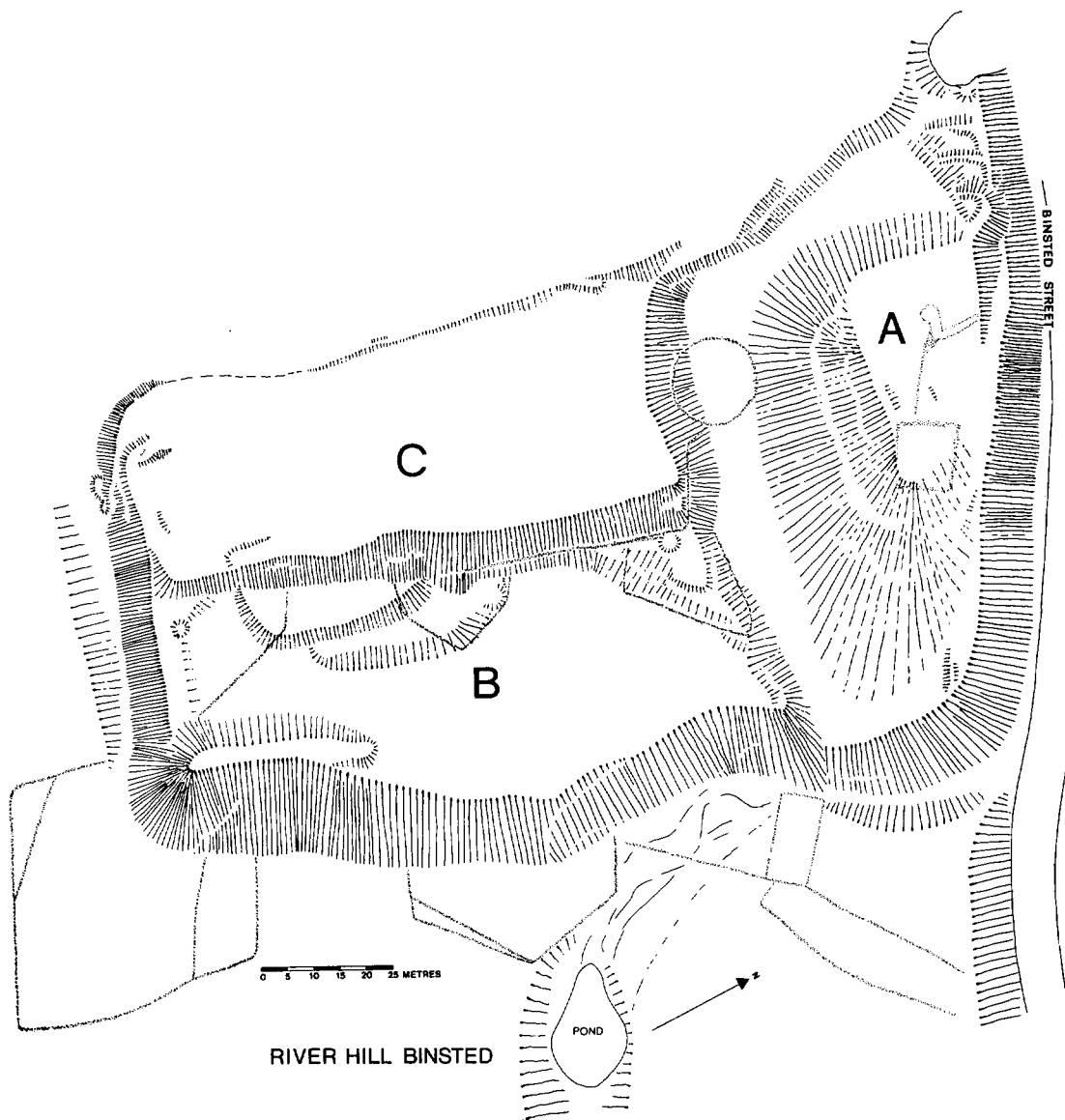


Fig 3. Plan of the earthwork at River Hill, Binsted. Features visible only from the air are shown stippled.

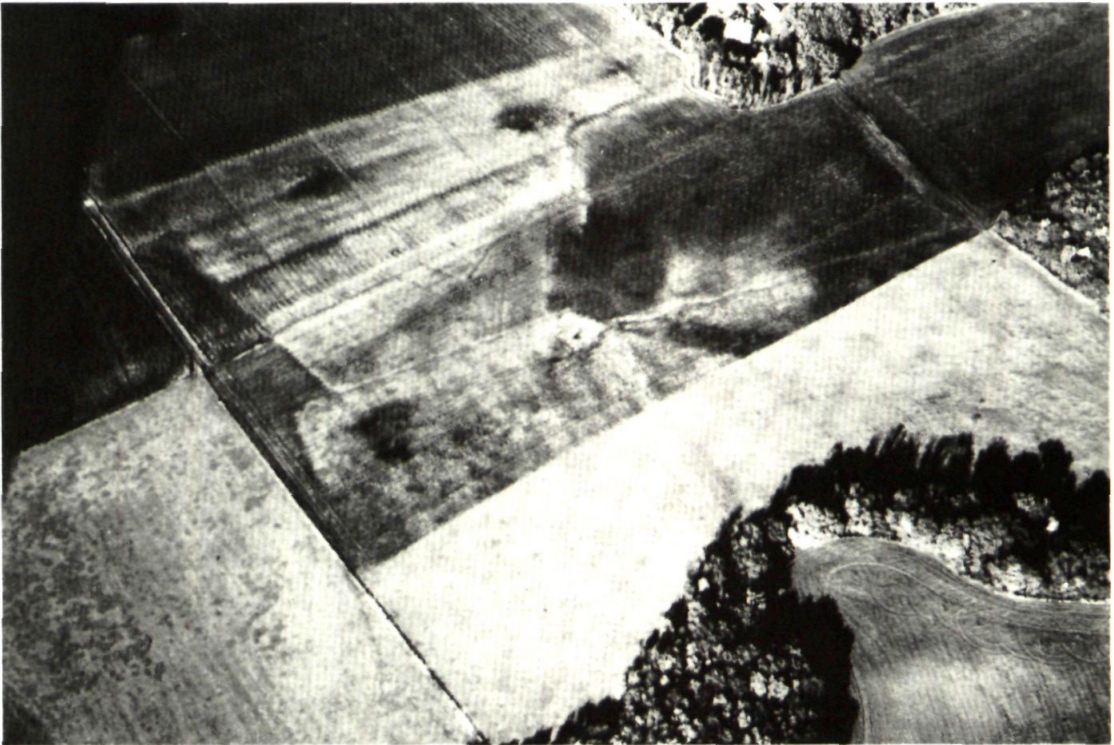


Fig 4. Infra-red photograph of Cathams fort from the south-west. An overlapping ravelin of Kings Close is also visible. Photo: author.

lands rented direct from Alton Westbrook and others from Thurstons and Binsted Popham sub-manors (BM Add. Roll 63708). To these were added 20 acres of purpresture taken from the north side of the wood called Straits at a place called Bullinghurst, next to a cattle pound, granted to him by King Edward in 1302 (PRO E36 Vol. 75-30; E32-168).

John of Binsted eventually became Edward's Chancellor of the Exchequer, and the manor remained with his descendants, although tenanted, until the 16th century. At the end of that century Bullinghurst manor was finally broken up, and the rents and services of the various components transferred back to Alton Westbrook direct (BM Add. Roll 27892). John Bristowe, described as a yeoman, died in 1573 and bequeathed 'my house, edifyces and buyldings with all grounds and

appertenances therunto belonging sett, lyeng and being in the said parish of Bynstede comonly called Poppahms Gaston; nowe in the tenure or occupacon of Richard Hammon' to his youngest daughter Joan (HRO 1573 BO18/1). Poppahms Gaston was a name given in the 17th century to a large area of copse and grazing on the south side of Binsted Street enclosing the earthwork on the south and east. It is therefore quite likely the house called by the same name is the old Bullinghurst capital messuage.

We have no certain evidence for the survival of the house after the early 17th century. Platform C may have originally been created as part of a formal garden over the medieval earthworks. The putative ravelins and bastions suggest that the site may have been a Civil War strong-point, in view of the considerable

military activity at this time in the area (see preceding Note). Strategically it was very well placed on the brow of the malmstone escarpment, with a commanding view of the cattle drift from Binsted to Farnham where it descends the hill east to Blacknest, and the tree line of the western edge of Alice Holt forest.

By the mid-19th century, the three parts of the earthwork were separate fields, as indicated on the tithe map. Cultivation in these fields may have removed much of the more

ephemeral evidence, such as that for the ravelins and bastions.

References

Manuscript Sources

- British Museum (BM) Additional Rolls 27820, 27892, 63708.
Hampshire Record Office (HRO) 1573 BO18/1, 23M49/1.
Public Record Office (PRO) E36 Vol. 75-30, E32-168.

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