Ymddiriedolaeth Genedlaethol
National Trust

Chirk Castle Garden Access Project

Heritage Impact Assessment

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Summary

The proposed new access path at Chirk Castle is in an area of high significance. It is within a Grade I Registered Park and Garden (PGW(C)63(WRE)), *and adjacent to a Grade I Listed Building* (ref. 598). *The new path is in an area which has been part of the gardens since at least the early 1700's.*

There will be a slight visual impact on the heritage assets, but this is considered positive as the new path reinstates the route of a 19th Century path and flight of steps into the Drying Ground and will be in keeping with the existing paths.

There is the potential for a slight physical impact on subsurface archaeology. The remains of the 19th Century garden paths may be revealed during ground works associated with the new path. This impact is considered relatively low and can be mitigated by the groundworks being carried out under archaeological supervision.

Introduction

A new access point is planned to an area of the gardens at Chirk Castle which can currently only be accessed via steps. An enclosed garden known as the Drying Ground is located directly to the south of the Castle, with the south outside wall of the castle forming the north side of the garden enclosure. To the south the upper levels of the stable range house the laundry with which the garden is associated. The garden is slightly raised, *c.* 500 mm, above the level of the rest of the formal garden to the east, the entrance for visitors being a narrow short flight of steps in the south east corner of the garden (Figure 1). The garden provides a quieter contemplative space for visitors.

The new access point will be created by removing a section of hedge, and border, part way along the eastern boundary and inserting a new path sloping at a gradient of 1:12 (Figure 1). The new path will be 2000 mm wide and 5500 mm long and surfaced to match existing gravel paths in the garden.

The ground level will need to be excavated to a depth of approximately 100 mm to allow for base layers for the path.

This document provides an assessment of the impact of the proposal on archaeology and heritage at Chirk Castle.

Legislative Framework

Planning policy for the historic environment in Wales is guided by a comprehensive framework designed to protect and manage the nation's rich heritage. The **Historic Environment (Wales) Act 2023** plays a central role, providing robust legal protection for historic sites and structures[1].

This is supplemented by **Technical Advice Note (TAN) 24**, which offers detailed guidance on the conservation of historic assets during development planning and decision-making[2]. Additionally, the **Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990** and the **Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979** are key legislative instruments that ensure the preservation of Wales's historic environment.

Together, these policies and regulations aim to balance development needs with the imperative to safeguard Wales's cultural and historical legacy for future generations

In Wales, a Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) is required for listed building consent, conservation area consent, and scheduled monument consent. It is recommended for changes to registered historic parks and gardens, World Heritage Sites, and locally significant historic assets. The setting of a historic environment asset must be considered in development proposals to ensure the asset's significance is preserved and enhanced. This includes applications for planning

permission and other relevant consents. Conducting an HIA helps identify potential impacts early and supports sensitive, high-quality changes.

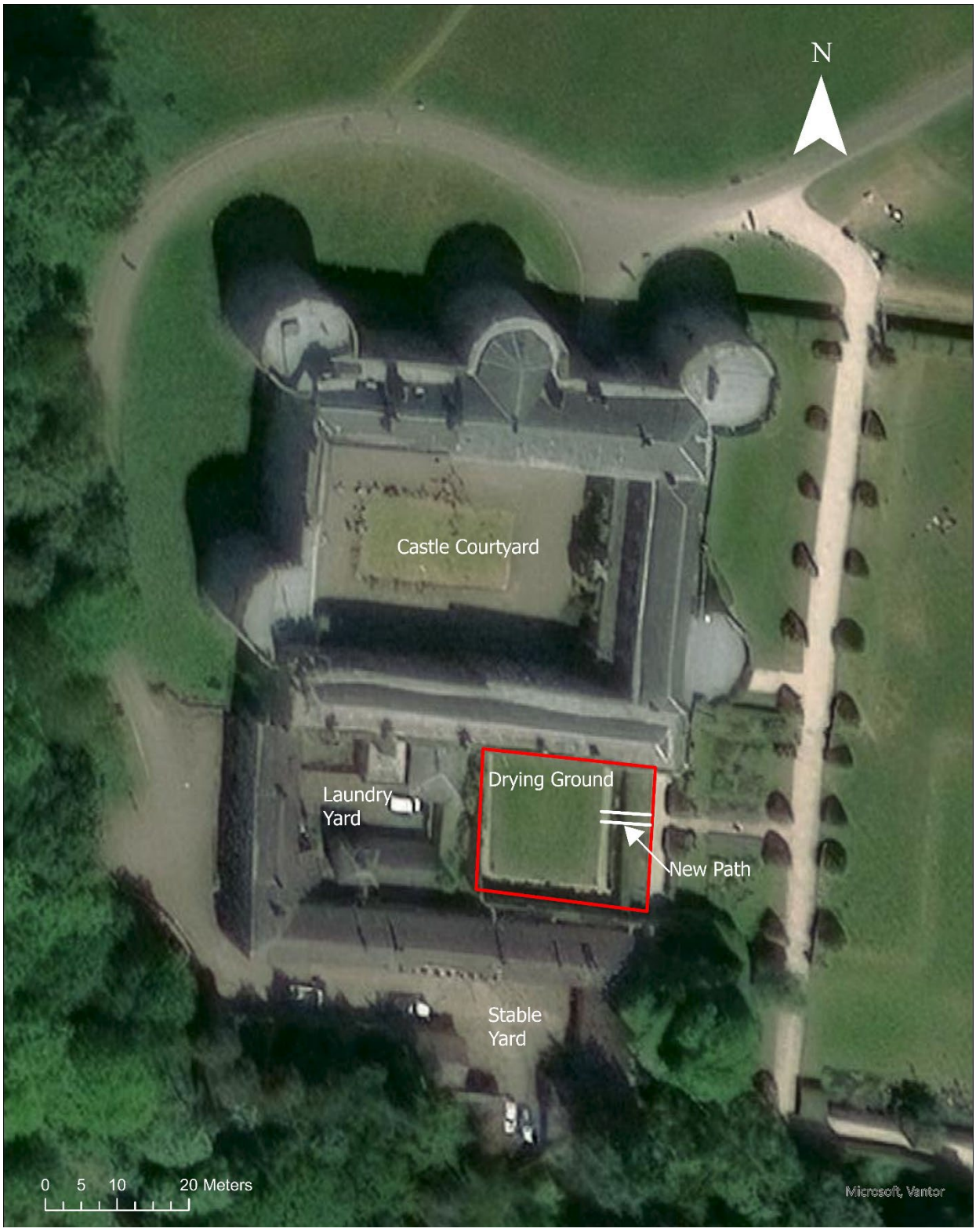


Figure 1: Aerial view of Chirk Castle showing the location of the Drying Ground and the proposed new section of garden path.

Background and Significance

Chirk Castle is a Grade 1 Listed Building (ref. 598). Designated as a building of major national importance, being one of the series of Edwardian castles of Wales, adapted to become the seat of an important marcher landed estate, in which context, successive leading architects and designers were involved in the creation of a major country house within the medieval framework (Cof Cymru).

Traditionally the castle was built for Roger Mortimer following his granting of the lordship of Chirk in 1282, with construction starting in 1295. It is assumed that Mortimer's Castle had the basic footprint of the current castle with a central courtyard surrounded by a curtain wall and with a series of towers attached to the walls and probably domestic buildings built against the inside of the curtain wall (Brooks, Jones and Gwyn, 2017).

In plan today the main Castle structure looks unsymmetrical with some suggesting that it originally extended further to the south into the area occupied by the 19th century stable range and the Drying Ground. Differences in ground level to the south and limited archaeological evidence, however, make it difficult to envisage how this may have worked. A Ground Penetrating Radar Survey was undertaken in 2018 in several available yard and garden areas in and around the castle. This located anomalies tentatively interpreted as a wall associated with the castle in the stable yard to the south of the drying ground. In the Drying Ground itself, however, only features related to the 19th Century formal garden layout were located (Magnitude Surveys, 2018). The interpretation of the results of the survey can be seen in Figure 2.

The Castle sits within a Grade 1 Registered Park and Garden (PGW(C)63(WRE)), noted for its outstanding landscaped park, partly designed by William Emes, and its terraced and informal garden which includes remains from the medieval period onwards (Cof Cymru).

The earliest possible reference to a garden at Chirk comes from an account roll dating to 1329. This contains a reference to the "wages of William le Gardener for the repair of the chief fishpond ….10s" (Gallagher 1996). This hints at the existence of a garden at Chirk during the late medieval period. While the flatter land to the east, where the present garden sits, is a potential site for an early garden, there is currently no archaeological evidence to pinpoint its exact location.

One of the earliest detailed visual representations of a garden to the east of Chirk Castle is a 1738 engraving by Thomas Badeslade and William Henry Thoms (Figure 3). This image represents the formal gardens at Chirk in the early 18th century having been developed by successive generations of the Myddelton family. The Drying Ground is seen on this image, labelled here as the Wash House Garden.



Figure 2: Chirk Castle Ground Penetrating Radar Survey Combined Interpretation (Magnitude Surveys 2018).

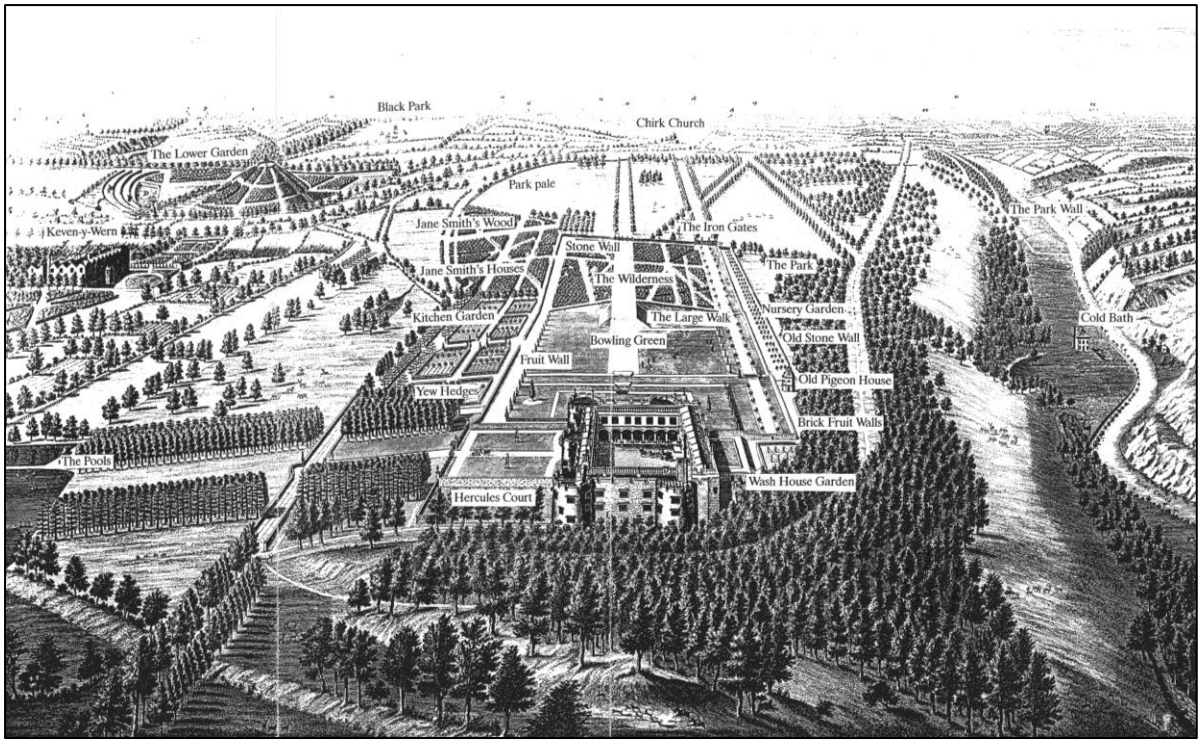


Figure 3: The West Prospect of Chirk Castle by Thomas Badeslade and William Henry Thoms 1738 (interpretive captions by Christopher Gallagher 1996).

Not long after the 1738 engraving was made work was underway to make changes to a less formal garden design. By 1764 William Emes had taken over directions to improvements to the park and garden. The formal garden was largely swept away in favor of Pleasure Grounds with meandering paths through naturalistic plantations and a limited number of garden structures seen clearly on the 1775 Estate map for Chirk (Figure 4). A rectangular plot adjacent to the south side of the castle represents the site of the Drying Ground.

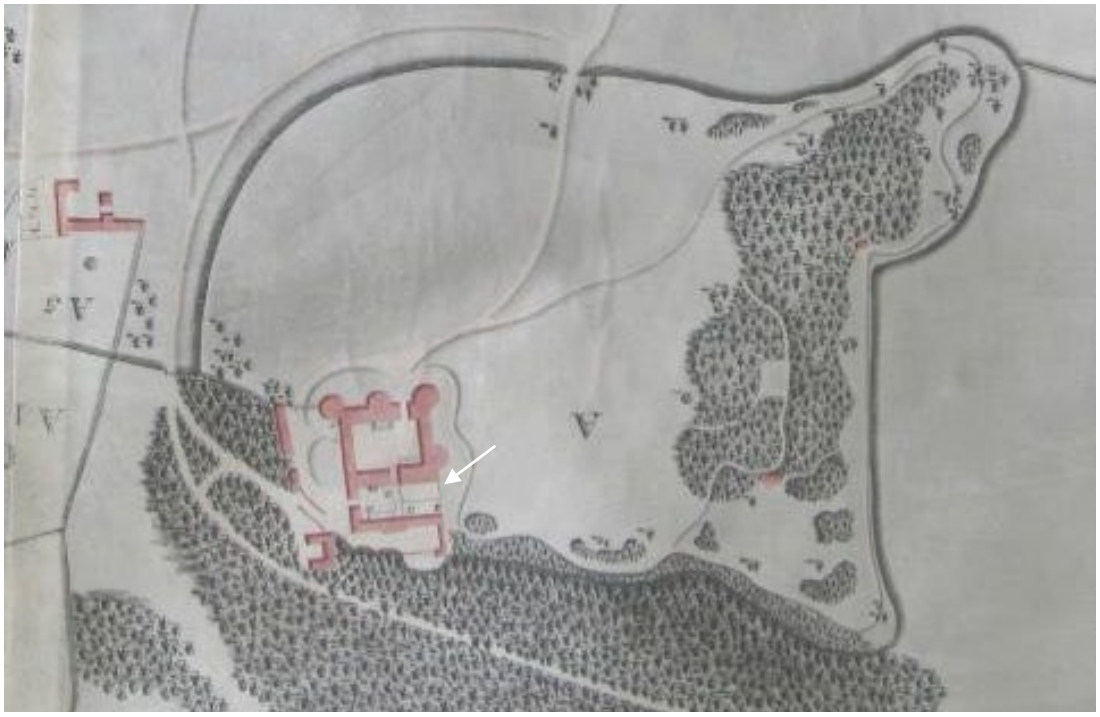


Figure 4: 1775 Estate Map for Chirk (National Library of Wales)

It was not until the end of the 19th Century that the garden reverted to a more formal design. Ordnance survey mapping dating to 1900 shows that a straight path had been established east – west along the length of the eastern garden and some of the Emes informal paths have been incorporated into a more regularized layout (Figure 5). The shape of the Drying Ground is now more or less square and a formal layout of cross paths with a central feature, pond or fountain, had been established. The east west path aligns with a path running to the east beyond the Drying Ground suggesting a link between the two parts of the formal garden. A photograph from the period supports this showing two flights of steps approaching the Drying Ground and a structure which may have been an entrance (Figure 6). Today only one flight of steps survives with a hedge and raised border crossing the location of the second flight (Figure 7). A Ground Penetrating Radar Survey undertaken on the Drying Ground in 2018 confirmed the presence of the formal garden paths and central feature (Magnitude Surveys, 2018).

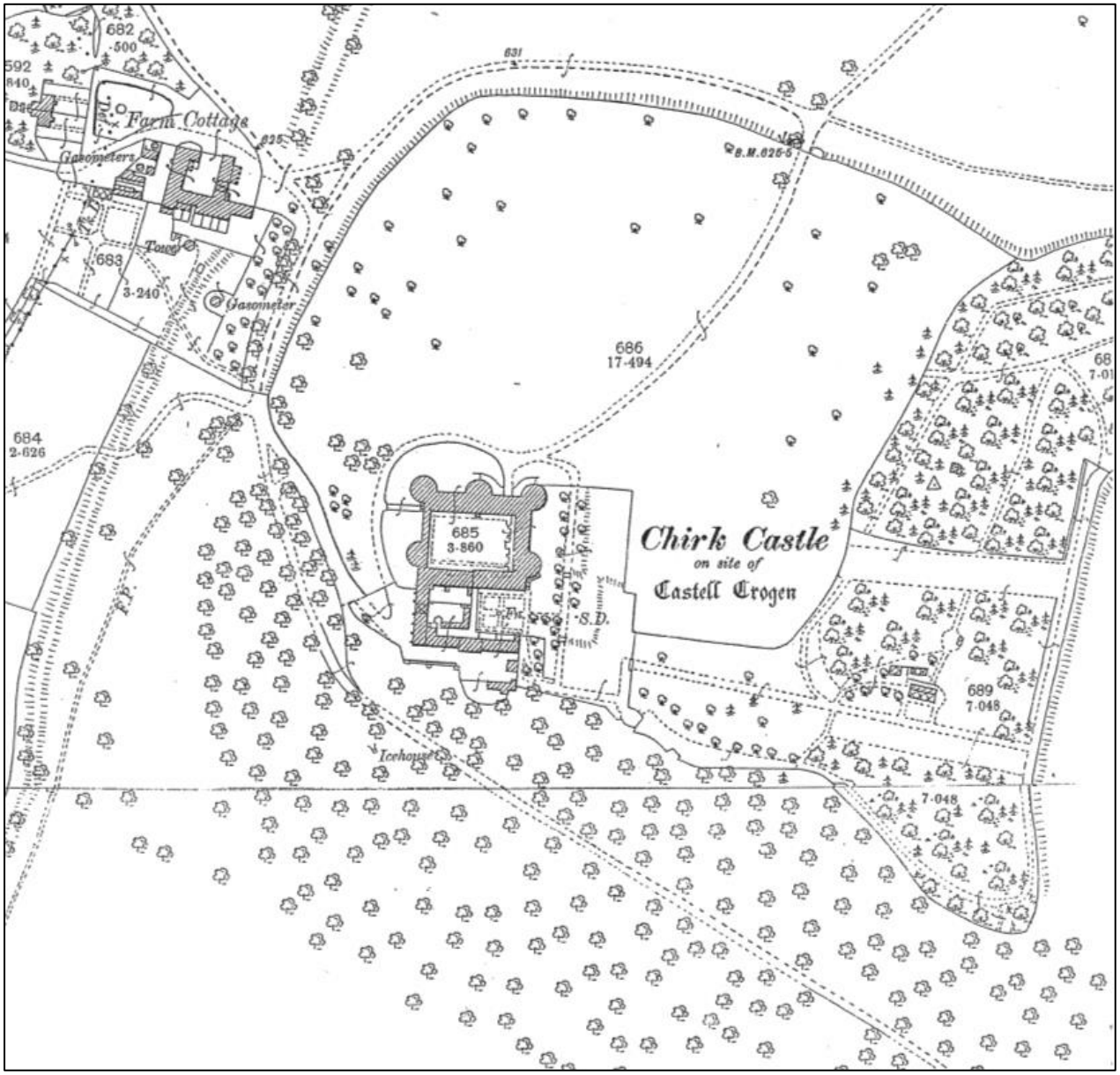


Figure 5: Ordnance Survey 25" map, 1900

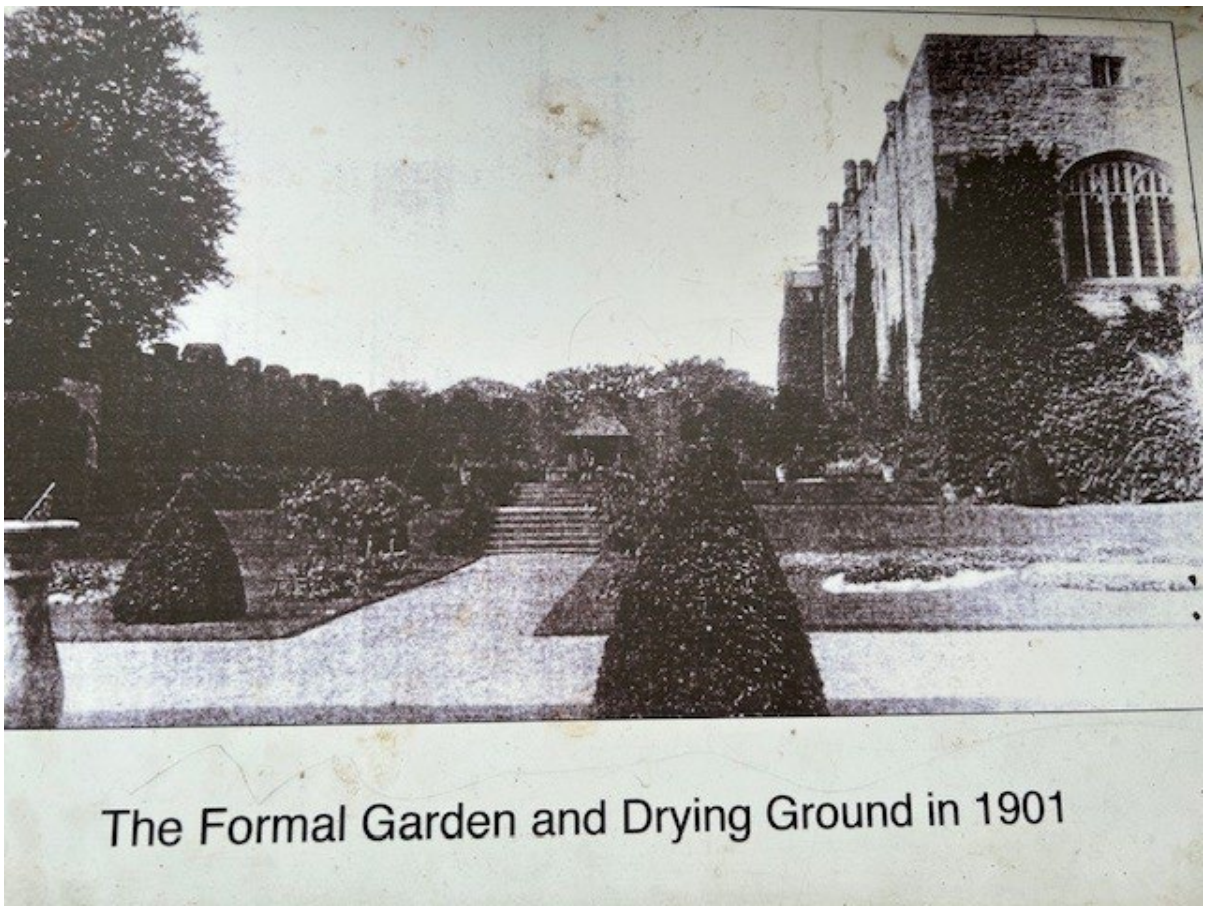


Figure 6: Historic Photograph showing two flights of steps approaching the Drying Ground and a structure which may have been an entrance.



Figure 7: View looking west towards the Drying Ground today and detail of border and hedge where a second flight of steps was once located.

Assessment of Impact

The proposed new access path to the drying ground has no physical impact on the Listed Building (castle). Located a short distance to the south of the castle there is a slight visual impact on the setting of the Listed Building. The impact is considered positive, however, as the route of an earlier path will be re-established, and works are in keeping with existing paths.

The proposed new access path has a physical impact on the Registered Park and Garden and any subsurface archaeological/historic features as the ground level will be reduced prior to the construction of the new path. The ground will be reduced, however, by only 100 mm. This level of disturbance has the potential to reveal features relating to 19th Century garden features only. Gardening activities and the planting of the hedge will potentially have disturbed/removed the previous path and steps at this location. Overall the physical impact is considered relatively low and can be mitigated by the reduction of the ground level being undertaken under archaeological supervision.

As with the Listed Building the proposed new path has a positive visual impact on the Registered Park and Garden, re-establishing the route of the 19th Century path and steps leading to the Drying Ground.

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