

**A circular enclosure
at
Redmarley d'Abitot,
Gloucestershire**

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AT
REDMARLEY D'ABITOT
GLOUCESTERSHIRE**

AI/43/2002

County: Gloucestershire
District: Forest of Dean
Parish: Redmarley d'Abitot
NGR: SO 758 309
NMR No: SO 73 SE 19

Survey: D Wootton and D Field
Report: D Wootton and M Bowden
Illustrations: D Cunliffe

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INTRODUCTION

The site

This somewhat enigmatic set of earthworks is situated to the south-east of Redmarley d'Abitot village at about 45m OD on an east-facing slope, centred at SO 7584 3096. The main element of the site is a sub-circular enclosure with a single ditch and a slightly raised bank on the exterior, previously classified as a moat. The island has a slightly raised platform, with traces of earthworks. Earthworks are also visible outside the ditch. The enclosure is of a small size, the island being about 35m in diameter, with the encircling ditch being on average 9m in width, and up to 1.75m deep in places. It is situated about 700m to the east of Redmarley church, at the bottom of a small valley, near to the junction of two streams. The field to the west, which is higher, contains pits resulting from gravel and sandstone quarrying. In a field to the north is the Old Rectory, which is built on another moat, partly filled-in, with possible traces of a pond nearby.

The survey

An archaeological survey of the field was carried out by English Heritage in May 2002. The aims of the survey were to present an analysis of the earthworks, and to enhance the record of the site in the National Monuments Record (NMR). The survey also formed part of a larger project to investigate and record archaeological earthworks within and around the Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Geology and soils

The site is close to the junction of two underlying solid geological formations: Bromsgrove Sandstone and Mercia Mudstone (BGS 1988). The Bromsgrove Sandstone is overlain by Bromsgrove soil which is a reddish coarse loamy soil (Soil Survey 1983). This is suited to cereal and some fruit and vegetable growing, but is commonly grassland.

Redmarley church is built of sandstone, and – as mentioned above – there is evidence of quarrying in the field to the west of the moat. Mercia Mudstone underlies the moat site. The second formation supports ‘whimple-3’ soils (Soil Survey 1983), consisting of fine loamy and fine silty soils, which lie over a clayey subsoil prone to seasonal waterlogging (BGS 1988). This type of soil is best suited as short term grassland, dairying, stock rearing, or growing winter cereals.

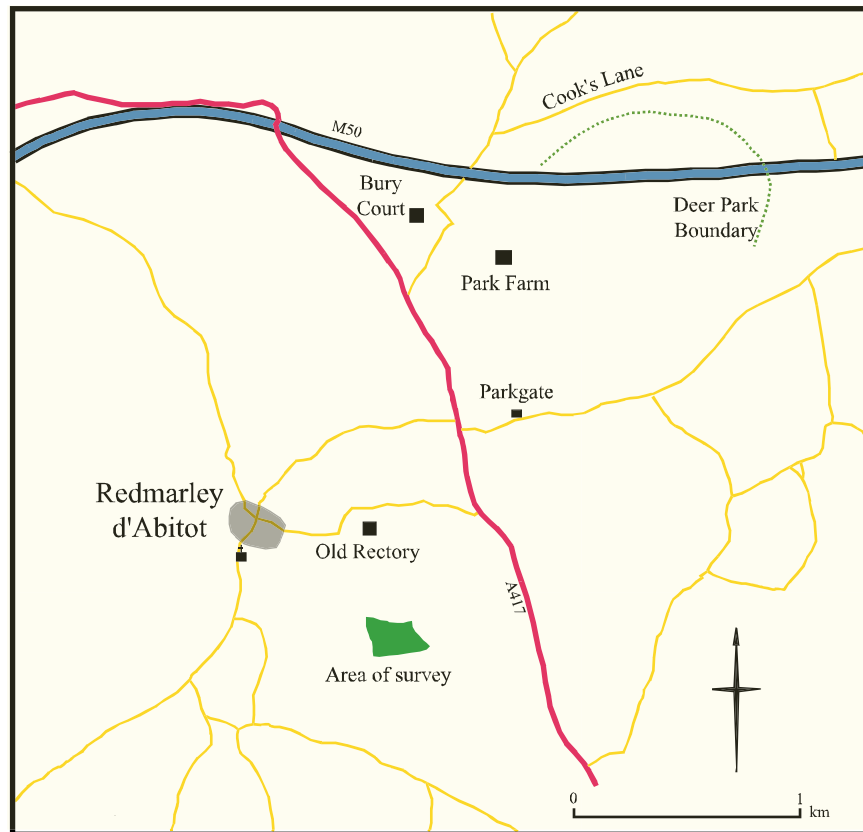


Fig 1. Location map showing places mentioned in the text.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

There are opposing views as to the meaning of the name ‘Redmarley’. The Victoria County History (VCH) of Worcestershire (1901, 16) attributed it to the soil type of the area, which is clay (marl) and red in colour. However, the name is probably derived from the Old English words *hreod*, *mere*, and *leah*, meaning ‘the clearing near the reedy pool’ (Smith 1964, 185; see also Gelling & Cole 2000, 27; Mills 1991, 270). The affix ‘d’Abitot’ had been added by 1086.

The first known account of Redmarley is in 963 when Bishop Oswald leased land to a man named Eadmaer. In 978, Æthulmund leased land at Redmarley from the same Bishop. There is also a reference to Redmarley in a charter mentioning Bishop Lyfing, which deals with land in the area (VCH 1913, 483).

By 1086 land at Redmarley was owned by Urse D’Abitot, the Sheriff of Worcester. He was famous for provoking Archbishop Ealdred to curse him with the words ‘Hattest thou Urs, have thou Godes kurs’ (Brown 1969, 234, quoting William of Malmesbury *Gesta Pontificium*, 253), because he built a castle so close to the church at Worcester that the ditches disturbed the monks’ cemetery. The Domesday Book records 7 hides of land (approximately 840 acres), which were held by Urse. The Domesday records also show that there were 23 villagers and 9 smallholders with 10 ploughs, and 8 slaves (2 female and 6 male). The mill was valued at 5s 8d. The value of the woodland, which was one league long by half a league wide was recorded as ‘£8; now 10s less’ (Thorn & Thorn 1982, 173a).

The manor of Redmarley was subject to several legal disputes but was held by the d’Abitot family and their relatives until the end of the 14th century. By the end of the 15th century it was in royal hands and later became the property of the bishops of London. It subsequently passed to other lay owners. Members of the d’Abitot family continued to live in the area until the 18th century (VCH 1913, 483-6).

There was a deerpark at Redmarley, which is first mentioned in 1457. The VCH (1913, 485) states that 'It has always belonged to the Lords of the manor, various appointments of park keepers being made by Edward IV, and Henry VIII'. The Reverend H Morton Nibblett (1928) mentions the deerpark, and a bank which 'may be seen on the side next to Cook's Lane, which runs for a considerable distance...whilst on the south is a park gate which we may conclude was the entrance to the property'. This park has now been sliced in two by the M50 motorway but much of its circuit is still visible in the current field boundaries and the place-names Parkgate and Park Farm are still in use.

There is no documentary evidence about the enclosure itself. The VCH includes a moat 'North of Evere's Farm' in a list of moats in Worcestershire (1924, 430). This site is about 2km to the south (NMR no SO 72 NE 6). However, no moat at Redmarley is mentioned. Nor is the site mentioned in James Bond's list of moated sites in Worcestershire (1978), but this is perhaps due to the fact that Redmarley d'Abitot had by this time been transferred to the county of Gloucestershire.

The 1838 Tithe map of the area clearly shows the shape of the field in which the enclosure is situated. The field at that time was known as 'Grove Meadow', and it was kept under pasture. The landowner was Daniel John Nibblett, from whom Joseph Stallard leased the land. Even though other moats in the area are shown, this site is not depicted. This is surprising as it should have been quite visible in a pasture field. Neither is it depicted on the first edition or subsequent Ordnance Survey (OS) maps.

The Reverend H Morton Nibblett, Rector of Redmarley, wrote a pamphlet named *A Short History of Redmarley d'Abitot* in the early 1900s. (As he was a contributor to the VCH for Worcestershire (VCH 1913, editorial note xxi), what he has to say is already included in the VCH.) Although he mentions many landmarks in Redmarley, he fails to make any mention of this moated site.

Local tradition has it that there was once an old rectory standing on the island of the moat. No documentary evidence has been found to support this. It is probable that there

is some confusion between the two adjacent fields. The field north of Grove Meadow is also called Grove Meadow on the Tithe map, and a building known as the 'Old Rectory' still stands there. This building is surrounded in part by the remains of a moat (Lane Fox *et al* (Sales Catalogue) 1977).

Three oblique aerial photographs of the site have been taken, on 14th February 1972 (CUCAP BHP3-4), 31st December 1973 (CUCAP BPG52-3), and 17th July 1984 (CUCAP CQG47-8). Although the site, classified as a moat, was scheduled as an Ancient Monument on 7th July 1999, no other archaeological work has been undertaken.

THE EARTHWORKS

The site lies on the lower slopes of a valley. However, assuming that the ditch represents a moat, it is not entirely clear from where it obtained its water, or indeed how water was retained and circulated. The ground slopes considerably from west to east. In order to get water from the northern stream to the moat elaborate damming would be necessary, and there is no sign of this. The smaller stream to the west provides a more likely source but there are no visible leats to carry water to the moat. It is possible that these have been ploughed out, and are no longer visible. Alternatively, the moat may have been filled by groundwater. The surface level of the island is raised slightly above that of the ground level outside the moat. Raised platform moats are less common than those which are level with the ground outside (Wilson 1985, 14). The material for the raised platform probably derives, at least in part, from the original cutting of the ditch. It may also derive partly from the demolition and levelling of buildings on the site.

Enclosing ditch and channel to stream

The enclosure is circular in plan with a gently sloping ditch of U-shaped profile measuring 1.75m in depth, and about 3m in width at the bottom. Around much of the circumference of the outer side of the ditch there is a slight bank which is raised 0.2-0.3m above ground level. There are no traces of it to the south-west or the west. This bank may have built up as a result of the cleaning out of the ditch.

To the north, a ditch 12m wide (**a**) has been cut from the moat to the stream. The west side of this ditch appears to cut the external bank of the enclosure on its north-west side. However, the bank on the north-east apparently respects the line of the ditch from the stream on its east side, its bank perhaps resulting from later cleaning. This probably demonstrates the widening of the ditch at a later phase, which, as it was widened, cut out some of the original moat to the north-west. In addition, the north-east section of the

moat is slightly out of shape, compared with the rest of the near-perfect circumference of the moat. This provides further indication that the ditch was widened.

As mentioned above, the moat is cut into the contour of the hill, making the east side lower than the west. Water could accumulate in the lower, eastern section of the ditch. It is possible therefore, that the later ditch leading to the stream was cut in order to take away excess water in the east.

Entrances

There are two possible entrances to the moat. There is a gap 2.5m wide in the ditch on the west side (**b**) making the circuit incomplete. It is possible that the destruction of a rectangular building and the digging of a subsequent earthwork (see below) led to later dumping in this area, causing the deceptive appearance of an entrance. This however, does not explain why the terminals of the ditch appear to be so neatly rounded off; any dumping would surely be less precise. This may, therefore, have been a permanent entrance causeway.

There is another possible entrance, 2m wide, at the east (**c**) where the ground immediately outside the moat is sunken. This hollow continues on the interior of the moat ditch. It is possible that a bridge was placed here. There may also have been a gatehouse here, as there are slight earthworks, which butt against either side of the hollow. However, the hollow is very narrow and it is possible that it has been caused by later activity.

In the south-west of the moat there is a small area of infill at the bottom of the ditch. The earthwork, c0.4m in height, is too slight to be an entrance causeway. Although it was presumably filled in at some time after the digging of the moat, it is impossible to tell whether this occurred during an early phase.

Island

The earthwork (**d**), which butts onto the south side of the possible gatehouse on the east, forms an irregular line to the south. Lying within this earthwork is a small circular depression measuring 3m in diameter. It is, unfortunately, impossible to tell if these features are contemporary with each other. As the circular earthwork is slight, it is impossible to tell if it demarcates a small building, or is no more than later cattle disturbance.

Further earthworks (**e**) form a square measuring 7.5×7.5 m with rounded corners, raised slightly above the surface level. Immediately to the east of this is a semi-oval earthwork measuring 5.0×7.5 m. This is also slightly raised above surface level, but not as high as the square mound. The west side of the semi-oval may have been cut into by the subsequent building of the square platform. However, as the north and south sides of both earthworks respect the same line, it is more likely that the two are contemporaneous. The change in level, or step down into the semi-oval earthwork perhaps demarcates a different level of status between the two buildings.

There is a small circular raised earthwork (**f**) slightly north-east of the centre of the island, measuring 3.75m in diameter. It probably represents some kind of building, but its function remains unknown. The building may have been a dovecote or perhaps a store or small barn. It may be significant that it is set a little back from, but opposite to, the possible eastern entrance, but without further evidence it would be unwise to speculate further.

On the extreme northern edge of the island there is a small sub-circular earthwork (**g**), which is hollowed slightly below surface level. This is probably damage caused by cattle, as it is relatively irregular and the ground surface here is pocked.

Small irregular linear earthworks are visible on the north west of the island (**h**); they may be the remains of fences, but without further evidence, it is impossible to establish what they are.

External Features

To the north west of the enclosure are two earthworks. The one nearest to the moat (**j**) is rectangular with rounded corners, measuring $c3 \times 17\text{m}$; it is probably a building platform. It is raised a little, and gradually slopes to ground level, except for the whole of its west side, which once probably extended further westwards. This now appears to have been cut by the adjacent earthwork (**k**). This is a shallow depression, measuring $13.5 \times 24\text{m}$, the bottom being sub-oval in shape, whilst the top is more rectangular. This may have been a cellared building or a pond. It is positioned conveniently close to the stream, and is deep enough to hold a substantial amount of water.

Immediately to the east of these earthworks there is a smaller earthwork (**m**) measuring $c5.5 \times 7.5\text{m}$ wide. This is raised a little, with a gradual downward slope to the surface level. It is narrow and rectangular in form, but its relationship to the moat is unclear. It could have butted up against the outside of the ditch, or it may be that the earthwork predates the moat, being cut into when the moat was dug. However, the earthwork is slight and may simply have occurred due to cattle disturbance or other later farming activity.

To the south is a small sunken earthwork (**n**), rectangular in shape, measuring $10.0 \times 8.5\text{m}$, with the east side open. This may be a building, or small enclosure. It is impossible to determine a date or original function.

Further east and down slope from the moat are the three sides of a large sunken rectangular earthwork (**p**), measuring $13.5 \times 22.5\text{m}$. It probably marks the site of a building, but is of undeterminable date. The fourth side has probably been ploughed out.

Slight traces of linear earthworks are visible on site throughout the extent of the field. Although the majority of these are probably field drains, it is possible that some, particularly those to the south of the moat, may be faint traces of ridge-and-furrow. Only the larger and more distinct drains have been depicted on the survey drawing. It is notable that these were mostly to the south of the site, upslope of the stream to the north.

DISCUSSION

The low-lying, wet area within which the enclosure is situated could well be the original ‘clearing by a reedy pool’ to which the place-name refers. The rest of Redmarley, as it stands today, is on higher ground, situated on the Bromsgrove Sandstone. The area around the moat could, therefore, be one of the earliest historic occupation areas in Redmarley.

The enclosure, if it is a moat, is particularly interesting because of its circular shape. Throughout the country, round moats are rare. For example, in Worcestershire only nine out of the 146 known moats are round (Bond 1978, 71, 73). The known moats in the Redmarley area are four sided, with only two known exceptions: a sub-circular moat is shown on the tithe map at Hither Haw Grove about 2km to the south; and a circular crop-mark is visible on aerial photographs, 5km to the north-east (NMR: SO 73 SE 61). There are three possibilities – that the Redmarley moat is later or earlier than the other moats, that it had a different function to the square ones, or that it is not a moat at all.

Date

Moats were constructed over a wide date range within the medieval period, between about 1150 and 1500, with a peak in the 13th century. It has been suggested that round moats may be of early date (Wilson 1985, 10, 12). Other remains of 11th-12th century date survive in the Redmarley area, such as the Norman undercroft at Bury Court Farm (Verey 1992; Walrond 1984, 306; VCH 1913, 482). Unfortunately, there is no evidence upon which to date the moat at Redmarley and, without intrusive investigation, this will remain the case.

Some moats have proved to be ornamental features of post-medieval date. It is possible that the Reverend H Morton Nibblett, the rector for Redmarley in the early 1900s, could have built the moat himself, as he was interested in history, and keen to identify himself

with the early medieval owners of the manor. The site is intervisible with the Old Rectory. This may be where local tradition connecting the site with the rectory stems from. If it was built at this late date, this would explain why the moat is not shown on the Tithe or first edition OS maps. However, if this were the case, the rector would have been more likely to copy the typical square or rectangular moats, rather than to dig one with an unusual shape. There is also an absence, apparently, of any documented reference to the building of a moat at this time. Furthermore, the evidence for buildings on the island and outside the moat, and for more than one phase of activity, renders this hypothesis less likely – the site simply looks too ‘untidy’ to be a Victorian-Edwardian folly.

The absence of this site from published maps is echoed at Moat Meadow, Hillend, Eastnor (NMR no SO 73 NW 61) where the substantial earthworks were not noted until 1983 (Thomas 1984, 459). In this case there is little doubt that the remains represent a moat and other features of medieval date.

Function

The moat could be contemporary with other moats in the area, but different in shape because it was built for a different purpose. Moats occupy a number of niches in the social ladder, from the very grand, such as Bronsil Castle, Eastnor, to the relatively humble. The majority of moats in the area around the Malvern Hills are small, marginally located and probably not of manorial status. This moat could have contained the manor house of the d’Abitot family or their successors but this seems unlikely. Nor can it have been a hunting lodge as it lies well outside the known bounds of the park (see Fig 1). This moat may, therefore have been constructed by someone in more humble circumstances. However, Bond stresses (1978, 73, 77) that there is no direct correlation between size or location and social status observable in Worcestershire moats. Not all moats had houses within them. Some moats are known to have surrounded monastic buildings, mills, and even chapels (Wilson 1985, 7).

As there is no evidence of a feeding channel to take water to the ditch but there is a channel to take water to the stream downslope the moat may have been dug for drainage – to keep the island dry – rather than for any other purposes.

Not a moat?

It is unlikely, but not impossible, that the site could be a prehistoric henge monument, with building activity of a later date. Its position in wet land, near to the junction of two streams running east to west and north to south; and also at the junction of two geological formations, may have given it some ritual significance (Harding and Lee 1987, 31-4). It is perhaps worth mentioning two similar sites, in Herefordshire. The first, near Eardisley, known as ‘The Camp’ (NGR: SO 2872 5200, NMR: SO 25 SE 2), is a circular earthwork with a single ditch and outer bank, the island being 40 metres in diameter. This is similar in form and size to the Redmarley site, which is around 30 metres in diameter. Although generally thought to be medieval, the Eardisley site has been suggested as a possible henge (Harding and Lee 1987, 161-2). The second is a circular ditched enclosure of similar diameter with a slightly raised island at The Combe near Presteigne (NGR: SO 3477 6344, NMR: SO 36 SW 3). This has been classified tentatively as a motte or as a round barrow but possible re-classification as a henge has been suggested (Keith Ray, pers comm).

In conclusion it is only possible to say that without further evidence, it is impossible to tell when or why the ‘moat’ was built. Some of the earthworks on the island certainly represent buildings but their function and date are unknown. It is also impossible to establish the date and function of the earthworks outside the ‘moat’, or their relationship to it.

CURRENT USE AND CONDITION

The site is privately owned, although there is a public footpath across it. At present, the land is under a grass crop, though the east side of the moat has some bushes growing on it. There is evidence of some cattle damage on the northern side of the moat ditch, and also on the north side of the platform.

As some of the earthworks are likely to be the remains of buildings, geophysical survey may be able to provide a clearer picture of the arrangement, and therefore the nature of the buildings, both on the platform, and around the outside of the enclosure. As discussed above, the enclosure could be a recent feature. However, it could potentially be an early circular moat, and one of very few examples throughout the Malvern Hills area, or even a prehistoric site. It is important, therefore that a date is established. Ultimately, only excavation can provide such dating evidence.

SURVEY METHOD

The survey was carried out in May 2002. Control, including the field boundary, was established with a differential Global Positioning System (GPS). The archaeological detail was supplied by hand at 1:500 scale, using taped offsets.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The survey was undertaken by Danielle Wootton, a student on placement from the Oxford Postgraduate Diploma in Professional Archaeology course, and David Field. The report was drafted by Danielle Wootton and edited by Mark Bowden. The illustrations for this report were prepared by Deborah Cunliffe.

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