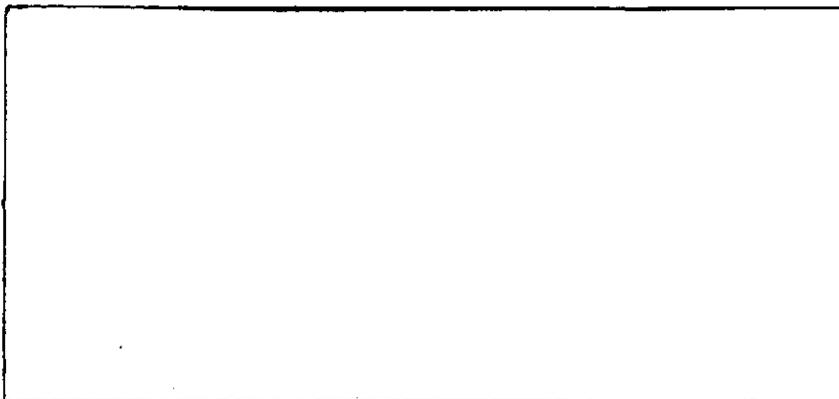


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**An Earthwork Survey at
Hobs Moat - Solihull,
West Midlands**

An Earthwork Survey at Hobs Moat, Solihull, West Midlands

Summary

A substantial moated site covering an area of 1.5 hectares has been surveyed. The site comprises an island enclosed by a bank that is separated from a counterscarp by a deep, steep-sided ditch. Evidence for another outer ditch, which was located during excavation in 1955, was not evident. Field boundaries to the north and south were also recorded.

Introduction

Hobs Moat (SP 18 SW 6), centred at SP 146825, was surveyed at a scale of 1:1000 by the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England (RCHME) in October 1997 at the request of the West Midlands County Archaeologist. The monument is situated at 120m OD close to the summit, and on a north-facing slope, of a low hill overlooking Hatchford Brook. It lies on a capping of boulder clay that overlies the Keuper Marl which is the predominant solid geology of the area. The monument is set within a recreational area in the suburban district of Solihull. A substantial number of deciduous trees cover the monument and on the north-east, south-east and south-western sides there is relatively thick scrub.

Historical Background

At the time of the Domesday Survey, the area of Hobs Moat lay within the manor of Ulverley and was assessed at eight hides with, in addition to seven ploughs and twelve acres of meadow, extensive woodland measuring 4 x 0.5 leagues (Plaister 1976, 42,1). In the early 12th century the manor formed part of the barony of the de Limesi family; the Ulverley holding later became known as Olton (Midgley 1947, 220). In 1295 it was in the possession of the Oddinseles family in whose possession it remained until at least 1596 (*ibid.*).

The first mention of Hobs Moat occurs in 1656 when William Dugdale noted:

... a large moat, containing within it at least an Acre, whereon they say a castle long since was situate, though now nothing be left thereon ... Some of the neighbourhood do call this Hoggs moat, which I conceive is intended Odingsells very antiently written Hoginsells' (Dugdale 1730, 939).

Previous Archaeological Investigation

The first archaeological investigation at Hobs Moat was undertaken in 1955 when a watching brief was carried out along the line of a drainage trench which was cut roughly mid-way along the northern moat ditch (Gathercole 1955; 1957). The trench continued away from the moat in a northerly direction to the south-western corner of a new church hall. Approximately 21m from the moat ditch a road paving, probably recent, and consisting of broken brick and ashes, was revealed just below the surface. Investigations elsewhere on the site showed that this road continued in an easterly direction to the present main road. Excavation at the north-eastern corner of the site in 1985 showed that this road dated to the 19th century (McIlwaine 1987). Further south in the drainage trench there was a ditch up to 2 ft 9in (0.63m) deep; a counter-scarp just to the south comprised layers of sand and pebbles, and finally subsoil. This ditch and bank may be the one that was noted by Hutton in the 18th century when he described an outer ditch enclosing the site (Willoughy Gardner 1965, 395).

In 1985 a Manpower Services Commission (MSC) excavation was undertaken at Hobs Moat (Nichols *et al.*, 1986; 1986a). Five trenches were dug, three of which were on the island itself. The first trench was located on the southern side of the platform and revealed a small structure described as 'shed-like' and dating to the late/post medieval period. This feature lay on an earlier structure, the only remains being a series of clay lines which may mark the position of timber footings. A second trench was located through the western internal bank towards the southern end. In this trench there was evidence for an earlier earthwork consisting of a low bank and ditch. This feature was subsequently used as revetment for the rampart. The third trench was dug within the internal bank on the eastern side and revealed the foundations of a sandstone structure with a clay and cobble floor. Finds from the site comprised principally medieval local coarse-ware pottery, tile and post medieval pottery.

In 1987, in order to alleviate the erosion that was being caused by bicycles and motorbicycles, conservation work was carried out on the banks of the moat (Streeton 1994, 12). This work entailed placing pegged retaining boards parallel to the slope in order to stabilize an imported layer of soil and turf. Although the boards are now exposed in places (see fig. 1), they still provide a degree of protection for the monument.

The Earthwork Survey and Interpretation

The moat island slopes gradually from south to north and covers an area of *c.* 0.65 hectares. Surrounding the island is a bank; on the west side it is complete and well preserved whilst on the southern side it is very degraded. Along the eastern bank there is evidence of extensive wear, and in two places there are breaks, the northerly break being in the area of the third excavation trench. There is also a break along the north side measuring 4m wide. Internally there is a spread linear bank measuring 35m long and up to 0.2m high that extends from the south side; the first excavation trench probably lies on this bank. To the north is an irregular shaped curving platform standing *c.* 0.3m high.

The steep-sided dry moat ditch measures up to 7m wide at the bottom and 2.5m deep. At the mid-point along the eastern side is a spread causeway measuring 12m wide and *c.* 0.3m high; this corresponds with an adjacent break in the internal bank.

The external bank is complete on three sides of the moat and on the fourth, eastern side, it is very degraded and can only be partially traced. In the north-west and south-western corners there is a break in the bank. These breaks may be due to erosion, particularly since an early survey shows the latter bank as a continuous feature (OS 2nd Edition map Warwicks XIX.4, 1904). A linear bank and ditch abuts the south-western corner of the external moat bank. This feature measures 115m long with the bank *c.* 0.5m high and the ditch up to 0.3m deep. It continues in the east as a very slight earthwork beyond the surveyed area. Whether this feature underlies the moat counterscarp is unclear since the bank is denuded at this point. There is also no evidence of the bank and ditch continuing west beyond the moat. On the northern side of the moat is a pathway with a ditch measuring up to 0.2m deep on either side. Examination of early maps would suggest that the bank and ditch in the south, and the outer ditch in the north, are field boundaries. (*ibid.*)

Hob's Moat cannot be dated with certainty; the limited excavations that have been undertaken would suggest that it dates from at least the 13th century; however, the excavation revealed an earlier feature that appears to underlie the moat, but this remains undated. The presence of post-medieval material would also suggest that it continued in use, or at least was re-occupied, until the 17th century.

The function of the moated site is also uncertain despite Dugdale noting the local view that there was a castle here (Dugdale 1730, 939). It seems likely that it was in fact a homestead or hunting lodge built perhaps for prestigious reasons and emulating the grander defended houses of the medieval period. In either case it was likely to have been constructed for the Oddinsells, the seigniorial lords of the manor. The massive proportions of the ditch, and the high outer bank, would suggest that the site was a defended moat although work in Cambridgeshire has shown that external

banks were probably the result of periodic cleaning of the ditch rather than being deliberately constructed for defensive reasons (RCHM(E) 1968, LX1). Taylor (1978, 8) also notes that most ditches of moated sites were between 3 and 6m wide; the ditch here, at its widest point is 7m, and therefore exceeds the upper bracket.

Access to the island was probably over one or more wooden bridges, although the possibility of a stone bridge should not be dismissed. The location of these bridges is, however, uncertain, despite the existence of a number of breaks along the inner bank.

Methodology

The survey was carried out over a period of three days by G. Brown and G. Kirkham and involved a closed traverse of five stations. Three profiles were also taken across the monument. The survey was carried out using a Total Station instrument to establish the control framework and points of detail, together with geographical features such as paths and buildings. Taped off-sets from the control framework were then used to record further archaeological detail. A day was also spent on limited documentary research at Solihull.

The report has been written by G. Brown with comments by D. Field and edited by M. Bowden. The site plan was drawn by D. Cunliffe, the three profiles that are depicted show no vertical exaggeration.

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HOBS MOAT



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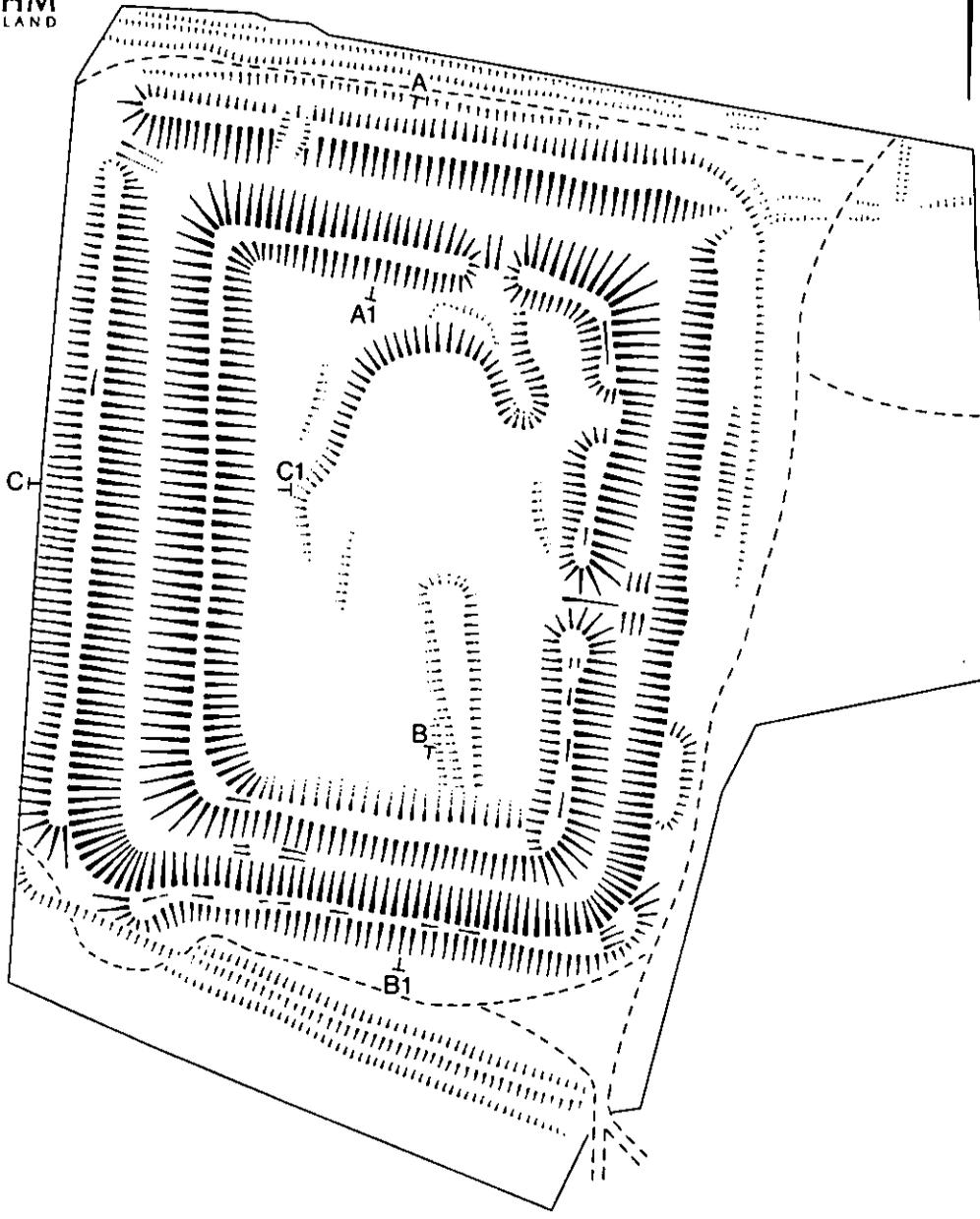




Fig. 1. The ditch at the north-west corner of Hobs Moat. Wood used in consolidation work can be seen on the far bank.



Fig. 2. The possible entrance on the inner bank of the moat island on the east side.