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Moons Moat
Conservation
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TEACHERS' NOTES

GENERAL HISTORY OF MOATED SITES

A moated site is an area of land surrounded by a wide ditch, which then forms an island, usually rectangular or square in shape but often forming an unequal-sided trapeziod-shape to fit into the surrounding landscape. Ditches are U-shaped and vary from 3m to 6m wide and are mostly about 2m deep. Occasionally the ditches are lined with clay or have stone revetting or wooden planking to preserve and strengthen the sides. The soil from the ditches was often cast up onto the island platform to level it for building on. This also raised the mound well above the water level which helped keep back the damp. Sometimes the soil was formed into an enclosing bank for a hedge, fence or occasionally a stone wall, which would have looked particularly impressive. At least one but usually two causeways or bridges would provide access over the moat ditches to the house and land on the island. Although moats may have been constructed in imitation of a castle or stronghold, they appear to be more about status and wealth, than defence. The area enclosed by a moat is not usually much bigger than a half an acre, although one acre sites are not uncommon and there are a few larger ones. There are examples of double moats and even several grouped together.

Not all moats are completely surrounded by water-filled ditches, some moats are L-shaped, three sided and very occasionally round, and moats on higher ground were probably dry. It is common for a stream to be diverted into a moat, which is then dammed to keep the water in and then controlled with sluices. Most moats are low lying to take advantage of the flow of water. Fishponds are often associated with these sites and are found on the side where the water is let out of the moat to rejoin a water-course. Some moats themselves may well have been used for keeping fish in. But there is no doubt all moats would have been used for the disposal of every type of refuse and unless they had a good flow of water through them, they would have been very dirty and smelly.

There are over 6000 moated sites known in England and the majority of these lie in the Midlands area - they are rare in western and northern areas. This may have something to do with the geology, as the Midlands is well known for its clay - perfect for moat making and draining wet areas. Moats were constructed from the late 11th century through to the early 16th century but the peak of moat building appears to be 1250 to 1350. The type of buildings within moats range from a single dwelling, to a manor house with a series of farm buildings around a courtyard with gardens or even a chapel. The buildings on them are usually much altered over four hundred years and occasionally contain buildings or additions right up to the 20th century.

The majority of buildings in Worcestershire would have been of timber-framed construction with wattle and daub panels - later replaced by bricks, but it is possible that the larger wealthier owners might have built their houses of stone. Occasionally the sill of the timber building would be placed onto a stone foundation or even onto a low wall about a metre high. The roofs of the houses and barns would most likely have been thatched but perhaps later as wealth increased the thatch roofs were replaced by tiles. Archaeological evidence is slight, post-holes and sill-beam slots are easily destroyed and surprisingly there tends to be few archaeological finds on these sites. Most moated sites were probably robbed out and the materials used elsewhere.

Some moats appear to have contained no buildings at all and may have been constructed simply as gardens or orchards, safe from browsing animals. Later, disused moats were certainly re-used as animal pounds and were ideal for rabbit warrens, as rabbits or coneys as the adults were called, were safer from predators on a water-surrounded island and it also kept them away from other crops.

Deborah Overton
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