

Hobs Moat Community Project,  
St. Mary's Church Hall,  
Hobs Moat Road,  
Solihull,  
West Mids.

April 10th, 1987

Dear David,

I am so sorry that it has taken me as long as it has to supply the enclosed. As you know I have been away ill, and then on top of that we have been absolutely overwhelmed by work, including the production of our Interim Report.

This is necessarily at a very raw stage even yet and I am enclosing a draft copy which I know, warts and all, is bound to contain some inaccuracy and a great deal of spelling/punctuation mistakes. I hope you will make allowances.

I do hope we will see you on the site in the not-too-distant future.

Kind regards,

James Debney.

HOBBS MOAT COMMUNITY PROJECT      APRIL 1987

The Metropolitan Borough Council decided in February 1985 to initiate a programme of works for the ancient monument. This was to include the tidying up of the site, its conservation and presentation and a limited archaeological investigation

Work commenced in September 1985 as a Community Project funded by the Manpower Services Commission. The project is supervised by the Borough's managing agency Solihull Enterprise Agency.

The aims of the project as stated to the MSC are:

- a. to tidy up the site and to conserve it and preserve it
- b. to create an amenity
- c. to create work for unemployed people
- d. by a limited archaeological excavation to investigate the history of the monument, thereby developing interest in the site locally and in the Borough generally.

Currently there are sixty-six people employed on the site of whom eighteen are full-time employees. All are on twelve month contracts.

Current Status and Progress

Since its inception the project has proceeded in two directions, which are given equal emphasis.

Archaeology

In its first year the archaeological team surveyed the monument in preliminary form, both for its shape and dimensions and with several sub-surface techniques. At the same time three areas on the platform were opened for archaeological excavation: HM1, HM2 and HM3. Collectively they represent about four percent of the scheduled area. All three areas were archaeologically rewarding and showed:

- a. that the monument is not a simple structure
- b. that it is medieval in date
- c. that it has undergone a complicated period of evolution before achieving its final shape

Additionally structures were found in HM1 ( ? a byre ) and in HM3 ( an apsidal-ended building antedating the present moat ), while HM2 showed an earlier phase in the development of the monument where the site had been occupied by a similar but much smaller-scale earthwork.

As a result of these findings the team was able to mount exhibitions in libraries and public buildings in 1985/6 and to give lectures to local societies and interested groups. These activities were very well received and attended and have continued into 1986/7.

In the second year the archaeological team developed and finished trenches HM1 and HM2 and reassessed trench HM3. This has been excavated further and currently awaits Scheduled Monument Consent from the Department of the Environment for a final period of excavation.

The archaeological team has now turned to surveying the monument intensively, both for its contours and for its resistivity and magnetic properties, while a further archaeological trench has been opened outside the monument. Further trenches, HME1, HME2, HME3 and HME4 are planned for the next phase of excavation July 1987 to July 1988.

#### Conservation

The first year's activity with this side of the project was hampered by a certain difficulty with the supply of materials; but great strides were made with the moving of rubbish, the cutting back of vegetation and in conserving the monument generally. In the first six months some one hundred-and-twenty lorry loads of rubbish were removed.

A path was then started on the southern side of the site and, as the supply of materials eased, this was extended along the eastern side of the site. Currently it extends all around the eastern and southern limits of the site leading from Castle Lane to Hobs Moat Road, providing a pleasant and highly attractive woodland walk. Much valued by local people it has achieved its primary purpose, that of getting people walking through the site off the earthwork itself and on to a clearly defined walkway skirting the monument.

The landscaping team has been equally successful in its second objective. The primary difficulty with Hobs Moat is that the vegetation, and then the topsoil, has been stripped from the earthwork by the activities of man during the last forty years. The landscaping team were required to reverse that process, or at least to restore topsoil and vegetation to the ramparts. An experimental section was laid out in August 1986 and this has now been extended to include the entire western limb of the site

It is hoped to reinstate the entire monument over the next two or three years' activity.

### The Field Centre

The Community Project has been very successful in its educational programme for the monument. Most people, it seems, now have some idea of the nature of the site and what it represents; many would like to see the progress made over the last two years extended to safeguard the site over a longer period.

A suggestion has been put forward therefore which entails the idea that a Field Centre should be established for the site.

What is proposed, apparently, is that, while the monument is yet to produce a great quantity of artefacts ( though it has produced a very great deal of information ), those that have been recovered should be displayed in a facility to advance further interest in the monument. This would have the second, double advantage that an educational facility would be created on the site possibly as a teaching aid while an amenity in its own right would be attached to the monument. It is possible that in so doing reference to other sites would be made ( the Borough has quite a lot of sites of archaeological interest ), thus designating the Field Centre as a sort of small-scale museum.

### English Heritage

The earthwork is a monument scheduled under the government's Ancient Monuments legislation. This means that no intrusive activity can occur on the site on any pretext without the permission of the Secretary of State for the Environment. The advisory body to the DoE is English Heritage, formerly HBMC.

Only the earthwork itself is a scheduled area and for various administrative reasons the Project has decided to, in the immediate future, opt for work outside the scheduled area in 1987/8. There is a strong academic advantage in this in that almost no archaeological work has been done outside moated sites anywhere in the country ( how did a moat fit into the local economy? what went on around it? ) and any information produced will be new to our understanding of medieval society. In due course an application for further Scheduled Monument Consent will be made to finish trench HM3 and for other works of the scheduled area and doubtless this will be forthcoming. However, when it does it will be regarded as a bonus for the Project, allowing an extension of our scope of activity not delineating its extent.

### Management Committee

It has been suggested from time to time that the Borough's

managerial control over the site and the Project should be developed, and that there should be a mechanism for formulating policy for the development of the earthwork. I understand that at this point a number of ideas have put forward as to how this should be done, including the suggestion that a management committee should be formed. It would perhaps include representatives from interested bodies, and would meet from time to time to consider general details about the management of the earthwork and perhaps, also, points of detail.

I am not opposed to this suggestion and can well imagine that it would contribute in considerable measure to the enhancement of the earthwork as an amenity in the community.

James Debney,

April 10th, 1987