

SOLIHULL ENTERPRISE AGENCY

SITES OF HISTORICAL INTEREST - BOROUGH OF SOLIHULL

A. SITES

Little evidence for the pre-medieval occupation of the metropolitan area has been recognised so far. There is a large Iron Age hillfort just outside the borough called Berry Mound (some 12 acres in extent), and there is a suggestion of Iron Age and Roman activity at Castle Bromwich. As yet no Neolithic, Bronze Age or Saxon sites are known.

The extant and former earthworks are all apparently, therefore, medieval in date.

In the following list forty-five such sites are recorded, but this certainly does not represent the final total. Because the metropolitan area is so exceptionally prolific in the category of earthwork, in recent years many have been destroyed or compromised.

1. Hobs Moat This is believed to be the largest earthwork of its type in the country. It was apparently a principal residence of the de Lemesi barony, and was the seigneurial homestead of the Lords of Ulverley/Solihull. A most unusual site of national importance.
2. Tanhouse Farm The timber-framed house and its accompanying moat were destroyed after World War II to build a housing estate.
3. Moat Lane A moat here was destroyed in the building of the present council depot. There seem to be medieval references to the site.
4. Libbard's Moat This site was the home of the Libbard family - recorded in the fourteenth century. The name Libbard means freeman and indicates the origins and status of the family and site. The moat is currently under threat.
5. Longdon Hall Longdon is recorded in Domesday Book and this site represents the medieval manor house - which may perhaps have been Saxon in origin. The moat was filled in about seven years ago. (See Buildings).
6. Widney Manor Farm A house is first attested here in a deed in the early part of the 13th century. In 1371 it is described as a sub-manor of Longdon.
7. Moat Farm, Packwood An almost complete medieval house surrounded by a square moat. There are timber-framed buildings outside the moat. (See Buildings).
8. Bentley Farm Records indicate a large wet moat here, which may have been destroyed in recent times. (See Buildings).

9. Whitlock's End Moat This large medieval moat seems to have been a site of some importance. It was filled in within the last 10 years and only one section of an internal rampart is visible.
10. Earlswood Moat A medieval moat. Aerial photography has suggested other sites in the vicinity.
11. Sydenham's Moat The possible home of Simon de Mancetter, Lord of the manor of Little Monkspath. It was abandoned during the late 14th or early 15th centuries, and in the early 1970s became threatened by the M42. Subsequently it was excavated by Solihull Archaeological Group. Other than Hobs Moat and Tilehouse Green it is the only site in the borough to have been investigated by a competent, professional archaeological team.
12. Sidenhale's Farm A moat lies to the north of the farm buildings. Foundations and paving have been recorded on the overgrown platform.
13. Elliot's Hall A medieval moat.
14. The Mount An unusual and spectacular moated site which was largely destroyed in the early 1970s for housing development. Previously it had been a scheduled ancient monument. The so-called excavations here were irrelevant and probably assisted in the demise of the site.
15. Marston Culey A possible medieval moat.
16. Castle Hills, Hampton A medieval earthwork, largely obscured. (See Buildings).
17. Hampton Hall The remains of a moat partially surround the remnant of a medieval manor house. (See Buildings).
18. Wharley Hall A later house has the remains of a moat around it. (See Buildings).
19. Eastcote Hall and Moat An early to mid-15th century house and rectangular moat destroyed during road construction.
20. Grange Farm, Meriden A possible medieval moat.
21. Netherwood, Meriden The site, a possible medieval moat, lies north of Netherwood Lodge.
22. Showell Lane, Meriden A deserted medieval moat.
23. Moat House, Meriden A dry moat with a later building on the platform. (See Buildings).
24. Moat House Farm, Meriden A second site of the same name. Apparently a medieval moat, but nothing else is known.

25. The Moat, Meriden A possible medieval moat.
26. Moat Farm, Meriden A possible medieval moat.
27. Giant's Den, Meriden A possible medieval moat.
28. Ram Hall, Meriden The Elizabethan house has the remains of a wet moat to the south west. (See Buildings).
29. Welch Hall, Meriden The remains of a wet moat enclose a half-timbered building. (See Buildings).
30. Fen End Farm, Meriden A labourer's cottage and a barn of timber framing are recorded on this moated site. The moat has been reduced to four pools. (See Buildings).
31. Oldwich Farm A 16th century house surrounded by a moat. The site has Shakespearian connections. (See Buildings).
32. Old Berry Hall A superb homestead-type moat of probably 13th century date with a later house. There are outworks evident (? including a second moat) which are probably connected with fish farming and agriculture. An important site. (See Buildings).
33. Ravenshaw Moat A medieval moat fed on two sides by a pool surrounds a large half-timbered house. (See Buildings).
34. Hillfield Hall A moat here surrounds the later building built in 1576. (See Buildings).
35. Solihull or Silhill Hall An extraordinary house probably built by Sir William de Odingsells (d. 1295) as a successor to the manor house at Hobs Moat. The site was moated. (See Buildings).
36. Maidens Bower This double moat is thought to have been the home of the Blossmeville who were resident in Solihull between 1290 and ca. 1400. The site was destroyed in the making of Dorchester Road.
37. Touchwood Hall The former hall built in 1712 reused an earlier moated site. The site and the hall were destroyed in the 1960s.
38. Kingshurst A Queen Anne house formerly existed on this small moated site. It was demolished in the 1950s/1960s. The moat itself is currently under threat.
39. The Moat, Tilehouse Green This well preserved moat was threatened in recent times by housing development and was excavated by the Department of Environment.

40. Moat Farm, Packwood An earthwork presumably of medieval origin. No other information.
41. Light Hall A moat is associated with the present house, which recalls the name of the medieval land owners.
42. Henwood Moat A possible medieval moat.
43. Manor Farm, Packwood An earthwork presumably of medieval origin.
44. Manor Farm, Dorridge A still visible moat retains water in its east and south sections. The platform exhibits the remains of an ancient stone wall.

## B. THE BOROUGH

This is the correct name for the town itself, the medieval centre of the now enormously greater area which is called by the same name. As such it recalls the establishment of the burgage town in the Middle Ages.

Burgage tenure was by means of strip-like tenements of land being let to free tenants, by the Lord of the manor, in return for money rent, rather than for services in kind as in villeinage, the normal means of land tenure at the time.

Solihull well exhibits the characteristics of a burgage town, with a wide main street (for the holding of a weekly market) with burgage plots on either side, and at the intersection of two important ancient routes. With a particularly fine and imposing parish church, St. Alphege's, it is a good example of this type of development.

The only interruption of this plan is the shopping centre Mell Square erected in the 1960s. It is possible that a number of the buildings fronting the High Street are more venerable than their facades would allow.

## C. BUILDINGS

Quite a number of buildings within the metropolitan area are of historical interest or have interesting affinities. The following list will certainly not be complete.

45. Old Berry Hall An impressive house dating from approximately the fifteenth century, erected on a 13th century moated site.
46. New Berry Hall This house was built in the 19th century as a successor to Old Berry Hall. It was owned by Joseph Gillott the Victorian manufacturer and inventor of steel nib pens. It has a large wooded garden.
47. Malvern Hall The present house was begun in 1611 and was added to at various times between then and the early part of the 19th century. It was painted by John Constable at this time on several occasions.

48. Knowle Hall  
Built by Lord Brook in the 1620s, this house was the first in Warwickshire to have the classical look which became so popular throughout the rest of the century. As its builder had connections with the royal court, it may bear the influence of Inigo Jones.
49. Knowle Guild Hall  
The headquarters of the Guild of St. Anne founded in 1412. This was a religious organisation which encouraged the observance of holy days and feasts. Masses were said for members of the guild, and between 1451 and 1535 the guild had up to 15,000 members.
50. Solihull or Silhill Hall  
An unusual manor house which was traditionally built by Sir William de Odingsells II, possibly as a successor to Hobs Moat. It was destroyed in 1966 by a speculative developer.
51. Mell Square  
The area now occupied by Mell Square previously contained a number of superior timber-framed buildings, in tenement plots preserving the layout of the burgage town.
52. Abel's Farm-house  
Widney Lane  
This was built in the sixteenth century and is reputed to be the work of John Abel, the architect and master builder to King Charles I. The walls boast a wealth of exposed oak beams.
53. Shelley Farm  
Off Monkspath Hall Road  
One and a half miles south of St. Alphege church, Shelley Farm is a late 16th century house with later brick additions. Both the house and the barn (which dates from 1474) were renovated in 1985 and turned into a public house. Old photos and memorabilia from the farm hang on the walls.
54. Grimshaw Hall  
A 17th century half-timbered house, this was the home of the Grimshaws, a yeoman family who entered the ranks of the gentry. It was a farmhouse until recent times. Queen Mary took tea with the owners just before the Second World War as a 'thankyou' for reclaiming the house from a derelict state.
55. Ravenshaw  
The half-timbered house on the moat platform here is said to have 14th century fabric in parts of its walls.
56. Longdon Hall  
The present hall dates from the 17th century but an earlier manor house was located on a moat in close proximity. The manor dates to the Saxon period and has been owned by proprietors as diverse as Edward I, the Abbot of Westminster and Lord Byron.

57. Oldwich Farm This 16th century house is still surrounded by the remnants of a moat and there are two timber-framed barns on the site. This is the home of William Shakespeare's ancestors.
58. Marlbrook Hall Farm and Moat No details.
59. Hampton Hall The remains of a medieval manor house surrounded by a moat; said to have been the ancestral home of Shakespeare's mother's family, the Ardens.
60. Wharley Hall The house dates from 1699 and has the remains of an earlier moat around it.
61. Welch Hall A half-timbered house, age uncertain.
62. Ram Hall A two-storeyed Elizabethan timber-framed house.
63. Moat House, Packwood This house is recorded as dated from the late 13th century (?).
64. Moat House Farm, Meriden The house with L-shaped plan dates to ca.1600. Timber-framed farm buildings lie outside the moat.
65. Fen End Farm A cottage and a timber-framed barn surrounded by a moat.
66. Moat House, Meriden The main body of this house dates to the 16th century and the south wing was built in 1609. The surrounding moat is mainly dry.
67. Sidenhales Farm The house near the moat was built about ca.1600 and is L-shaped in plan.
68. Hillfield Hall There has been a Hillfield Hall since 1351. The structure visible today was built in 1576. Most unusually for the time it is a brick built house with two extraordinary polygonal towers on each side on the main entrance.

#### D. CHURCHES

The metropolitan area has nine churches of historical interest.

1. St. Alphege's, Solihull Alphege was a saint held in high esteem by the West Saxon royal family and it is possible, because of the associations of Ulverley with a member of that family, that the church was founded by Cristina, sister of Edgar Atheling, and dedicated to St. Alphege. The present building was begun in ca.1220 by Hugo de Odingsells, and various additions have been made since then.

2. St. Nicholas's, Elmdon A small church in the Gothic style built in 1781 by Abraham Spooner, Lord of the manor of Elmdon. It is thought to have been built on the site of a tiny Saxon church, and remains have been found in the churchyard which perhaps support this suggestion.
3. St. Mary's, Temple Balsall Built by the Knights Templar in 1290 to replace an earlier chapel, some of the timbers from this early chapel were incorporated in the church.
4. St. Mary's and St. Bartholomew's, Hampton-in-Arden A church was recorded here in Domesday but it was replaced by another in 1130 by Geoffrey de Wirce, Lord of the manor. It was used by the Templars prior to the construction of their church. The heart of a crusader was deposited here.
5. St. Laurence's, Meriden The church is 12th century in origin with additions from the 13th, 14th, 15th and 16th centuries.
6. St. John the Baptist, St. Laurence and St. Anne, Knowle A licence was granted to Walter Cook in 1396 to build this church. It was the base for the Guild of St. Anne which was established in 1412 by the same Walter Cook.
7. St. Swithin's, Barston A medieval church here was rebuilt in 1721.
8. St. John the Baptist, Berkswell The chancel and the crypt of this church date from 1150, with 14th century additions.
9. St. Peter's, Bickenhill The nave and aisle of this church dates from the 12th century, and the chancel was built in about 1300, but with additions during the 14th and 15th centuries.

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