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A Circular Moat at Long Hills Farm, Mickleton, Gloucestershire.

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Introduction

Mickleton parish is situated on the boundary between the Cotswolds and the Midland plain (Fig. 1) and as a result of 20th-century changes to the county boundary is the most northerly parish in Gloucestershire. A circular moat has been discovered on aerial photographs of a field adjacent to Long Hills Farm, approximately 800 m south of the village at OS Nat. Grid SP 16034277 (Fig. 2). These photographs were consulted as part of English Heritage's National Mapping Programme (NMP) survey of the northern Cotswolds (Bewley 2001). The moat survived as an earthwork in 1946 and later photography (in 1981, 1993 and 2005) documents the gradual levelling of the earthwork through ploughing which has revealed additional detail in the form of soil marks.

Mickleton village is placed centrally within the boundaries of its parish with level ground to the north and north-west giving way to the Cotswold scarp to the south and east. Near the centre of the village is the church of St Lawrence, which dates from *c.*1200, and the manor house, the earliest surviving part of which is of 17th-century date (Verey and Brooks 1999, 476). The 1940s aerial photographs show the unsettled parts of the parish, and indeed the whole of northern edge of Gloucestershire and southern Worcestershire, to be almost completely covered in medieval ridge-and-furrow, preserved at that time in pasture. The settlements of Hidcote Bartrim and Hidcote Boyce, *c.*1.5 km to the east and south-east respectively of the moated site, were both originally in Mickleton parish (Moore 1989, 142–3). Approximately 400 m to the south-west of the moat are the earthworks of house platforms, toft boundaries and hollow ways which appear to be the remains of another hamlet subsidiary to Mickleton (Fig. 3). The area occupied by these remains is marked Overtown on a 17th-century map (Fig. 4).

Physical Evidence

The moat is situated at about 90 m above OD towards the foot of the Cotswold scarp at a point where the ground falls away on three sides. The underlying geology is Lower Lias, mainly clay. The higher ground to the south and east includes Middle and Upper Lias and Inferior Oolite (Geological Survey of Great Britain, Sheet 200, Stratford-upon-Avon). The moat is one of relatively few that are round (Le Patourel 1978, 41) and it is much closer to a true circle than other examples (see for instance Bowden 2005, 39, 42). The central island is *c.*30 m in diameter, the encircling ditch measuring *c.*8 m in width and an outer bank between 4 and 6 m in width. There is a break in the bank on the north-west side from which a channel heads to a point now occupied by a pond. North of this is a long depression which may represent the remains of a larger pond. There is a spring further upslope to the west and a field ditch to the south which closely follows the south-west curve of the earthworks. There are no clear remains of any structures either within or without the enclosure but the ground of the interior is uneven. The entire field was ploughed

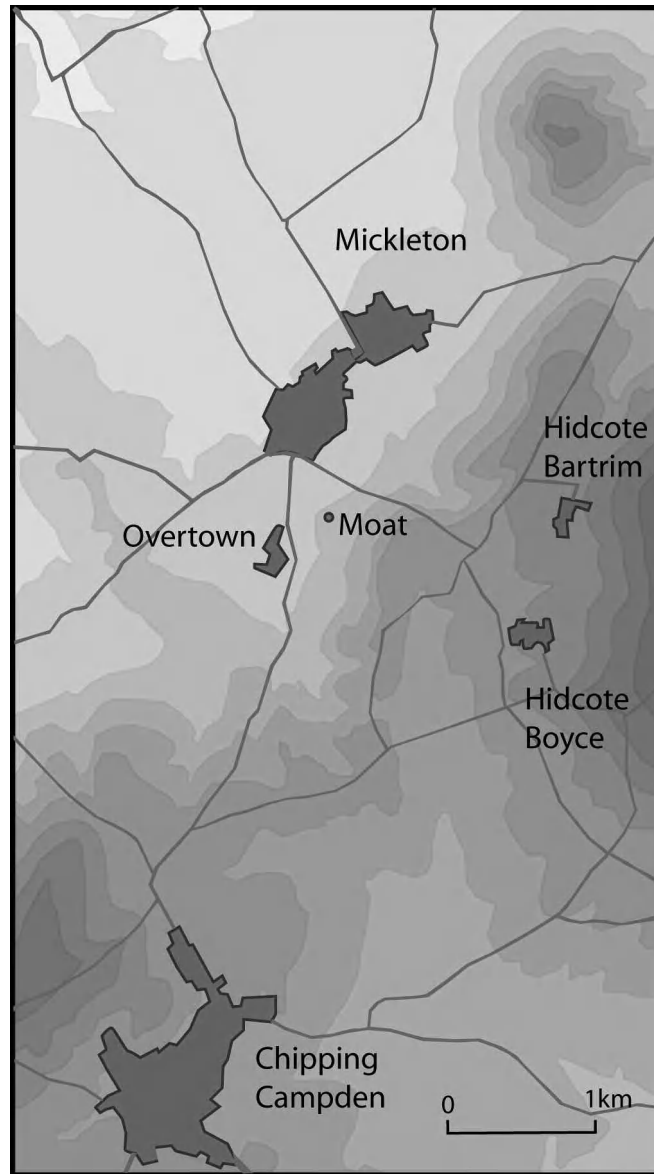


Fig. 1. Location of the Mickleton moat in relation to local settlements and the Cotswold scarp.

over, probably in the Middle Ages, which created the familiar ridge-and-furrow earthworks but did not obliterate the moat. The earthworks of both can be seen, the one superimposed upon the other, in the earlier photography.



Fig. 2. The circular moat at Long Hills Farm as seen as an earthwork in a photograph taken in 1981: NMR OS/81052 11 29-JUL-1981 © Crown copyright Ordnance Survey. All rights reserved.

Documentary Evidence

Mickleton was given to Eynsham abbey (Oxon.) in 1005 and it remained a possession of the abbey until the Dissolution, except for a short time when Eynsham's estates were transferred to the abbey at Stow (Lincs.) in the late 11th century (Hardy, Dodd and Keevil 2003, 10–11). After the Dissolution, Mickleton passed through a number of hands including the Graves family, which took possession in 1657 (Gloucestershire Archives, D 5626/1/25). Richard Graves (1677–1729) was an antiquary whose unpublished research included work on the history of the manor and of the hundred of Kiftsgate. The moat must have been clearly visible in the 17th century as it is depicted on a map of the manor of Mickleton dated 1698, shown as two concentric circles within a field called 'Moat Meadow alias Hillocky Meadow' (Fig. 4). To the south are three fields called 'The 3 Longhills' but no buildings are shown where Long Hills Farm now stands. The earliest reference found alluding to the site is the 'moat meadow' recorded in a document of 1656 (Gloucestershire Archives, D 5626/13/1/19). There are no known references directly to the earthwork and it does not appear on the first or later editions of the Ordnance Survey maps; the overlying ridge-and-furrow may have contributed to it being overlooked. Even though the moat itself is not shown on these maps the curve of the field boundary as it follows the earthwork does provide a clue to its existence.

Although the moat has escaped notice the adjacent Long Hills Farm has not. In the Domesday Book Langeberge manor with its member Mene is recorded in the hundred of Kiftsgate, and attempts to locate these sites have been made. Mene is now accepted to be Meon in Quinton to the north-west of Mickleton and Long Hills Farm has been suggested as the site of the parent manor (Smith 1964, xiii). It has been noted that 'Long Hills' is a literal (plural) translation of Langeberge (Moore 1990, 107). However, Warmington states that Long Hills Farm cannot be

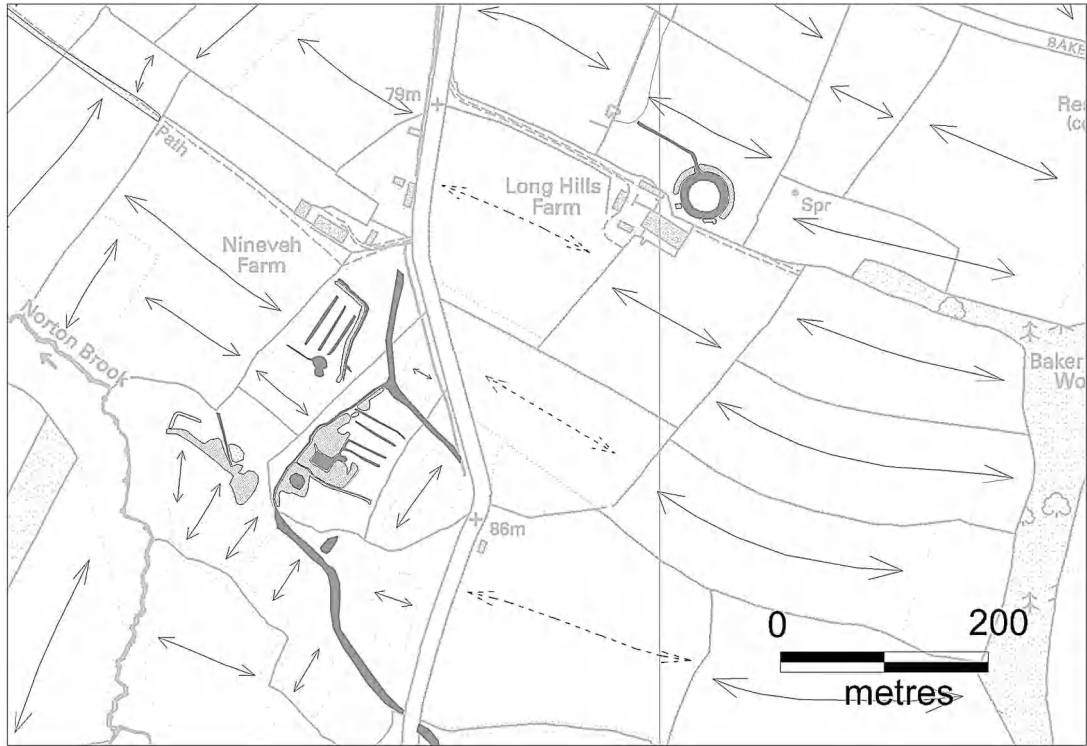


Fig. 3. Archaeological features transcribed from aerial photographs. Transcription © English Heritage. NMR. The base map © Crown copyright Ordnance Survey. All rights reserved.

Cut features such as the moat and hollow-ways are represented as solid blocks of grey and raised remains such as banks and building platforms are stippled. These conventions are used irrespective of whether the features survive as earthworks or are seen as cropmarks. Blocks of ridge-and-furrow have been outlined with the arrows indicating the direction of ploughing. Dashed arrows indicate that the ridge-and-furrow has been levelled.

the site of Langeberge as the area was within the bounds of Mickleton manor in a charter dated 1005 (Warmington 1984, 40).

Discussion

Date

Moats were built throughout the period 1150–1500, the majority constructed between 1200 and 1325 (Le Patourel and Roberts 1978, 46). Round moats are thought to have only been dug in the earlier part of the period, although the evidence for this is slight (Le Patourel 1978, 41). That the Mickleton moat did not act as a settlement focus may suggest that it was built after the formation of villages in the Cotswolds, a process dated to the 10th–12th centuries (Dyer 2002, 32). The ploughing of the abandoned moat could not have been prolonged as the ridge-and-furrow did not obliterate the site. Furthermore, the ridges are relatively straight, still reflecting their original lines. Continual ploughing would have eventually created the characteristic reverse-‘S’ shape seen in the adjacent field. The ridge-and-furrow itself is likely to have been abandoned in the early 14th

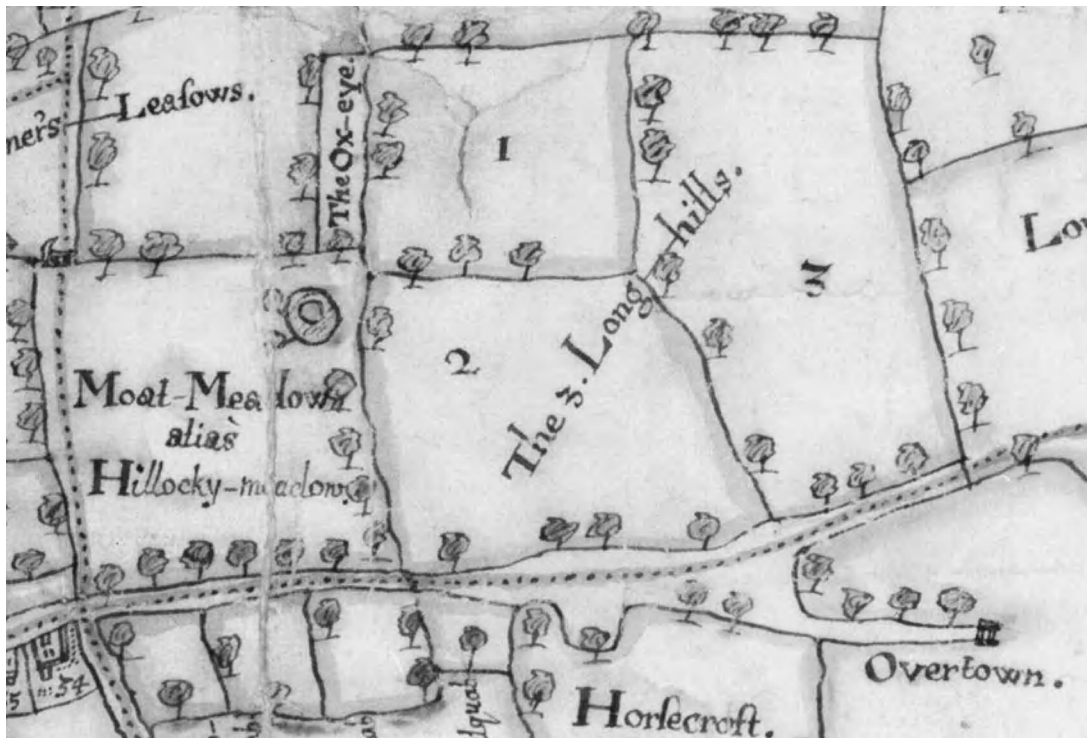


Fig. 4. Detail of a map of Mickleton Manor dated 1698 reproduced by permission of English Heritage. NMR via P.M. Reid/Miss M.G. Hamilton. North is to the left.

century, the date when many Cotswolds ploughlands were converted to pasture as arable farming became less profitable (Dyer 2002, 32). The relatively rapid destruction and deliberate ploughing over of the moat might also suggest an element of dispute between competing individuals or groups, a situation which also raises the possibility that the site was never occupied. It must be noted that although a medieval date for the ridge-and-furrow is most likely a post-medieval date cannot be excluded (Hall 1982, 32).

Significance of Moats

Moated sites have proved difficult to classify due to the immense variety of size and shape in this class of monument (Taylor 1978). A number of functional reasons for their construction have been put forward – moats were built for defence, for drainage, or for use as a fishpond or a source of fresh water – and on a cultural or symbolic level they could have been constructed to demonstrate social prestige (Wilson 1985, 17–23). In many cases moats could only offer a low level of security (Le Patourel and Roberts 1978, 47) and the argument that they were dug for drainage is not convincing (Wilson 1985, 20–1). Moats do, however, create a barrier between those without and those within and the use of water to create a barrier may be significant as water carried certain symbols to the medieval mind; it was a symbol of salvation (Johnson 1992, 46) as well as a habitat for fish and birds, the exploitation of which was a lordly pursuit (Dyer 1988, 34–5). Some waterfowl such as swans also had a symbolic value (Everson 1998, 33). The combination of symbolic and functional roles reflects the need of some medieval buildings and their designed landscapes to serve

requirements that cannot easily be disentangled from one another (Johnson 2002, 42). That the digging of a moat could equate to a claim for status is illustrated by the fact that moat building was not just associated with manor houses and that the assertion of status could be far down the social scale (Bowden 2005, 40). The provision of a moat in some cases was the only distinguishing feature of certain sites which as far as their buildings were concerned were 'the same as hundreds of other medieval buildings up and down Britain' (Wilson 1985, 8).

Significance of Location

Moated sites are generally found in lowland Britain in areas with clay subsoil; there is also a high coincidence between moats and areas that were assarted (Wilson 1985, 29; Bond 1978, 71). Of the 141 sites in Gloucestershire indexed as moats (English Heritage database) there are very few on the high limestone plateau that makes up the Cotswolds. There is a concentration of moats to the north and north-west of Gloucester, land that includes part of the forest area of the county assarted in the early Middle Ages and disafforested in the early 14th century. In contrast, strict adherence to forest law in the royal Forest of Dean has resulted in very few moats there (Small and Stoertz 2006; Wilson 1985, 29).

The location of the Mickleton moat on a Benedictine estate is notable as it has been suggested that the presence of this monastic order in the south-east of Worcestershire limited the number of moats there (Bond 1978, 73). Who built the moat and the circumstances of its construction, however, remain unanswered questions.

Many non-village settlements were founded in the Cotswolds during the 12th and 13th centuries to house those who worked at remote sites such as mills and sheepcots or were built on land recently cleared of trees (Dyer 2002, 17, 20, 28). These dispersed sites were not necessarily moated but place-name evidence in Worcestershire shows a high coincidence of moats and assarting (Bond 1978, 77). The limited place-name evidence for woodland in the north Cotswolds (Hooke 1978) suggests that assarting is not the most likely explanation for the origin of the Mickleton site.

During the 13th century social division became ever more prominently displayed (Hinton 1993, 162). It could be demonstrated through physical separation as, in addition to the creation of moats, a number of high-status sites within villages were abandoned and rebuilt at the village edge (Le Patourel and Roberts 1978, 49; Hinton 1993, 162). Another suggested manifestation of this trend is the tendency of lords from the 14th century to take meals privately and not in the great hall with the entire household (Williamson and Bellamy 1987, 61–2). However this example of social separation can also be seen as a move towards greater privacy. If privacy was a requirement for the builder of Mickleton moat, one might have expected that a more secluded site would have been chosen. Within the landscape Long Hills does not occupy a peripheral position within either the parish or the manor boundaries and it is close to both Mickleton and Overton and to the road to Chipping Campden (which linked the two settlements). Topography can provide seclusion irrespective of distance from other settlements but this is not the case here, as the moat occupies an (albeit slightly) elevated position. When its position is considered in relation to the two settlements it suggests that a claim for status, which needed to be displayed, was being made to the inhabitants of both settlements.

Conclusion

From the evidence available a tentative attempt has been made to explain the moated site at Long Hills. The shape of the earthwork and its relationship to the ridge-and-furrow suggest an early date for construction. It is likely that it was dug during the major period of moat building in the

13th century and then abandoned and ploughed over later in the 13th or at the start of the 14th century. The relatively short life of the moat might have been the result of a dispute between competing individuals or groups. The symbolic and functional qualities of moats meant that their construction provided a prominent display of social division and a position outside existing settlements could suggest that this display was intended only for those visiting the site. However, Long Hills is not hidden in the landscape and, if display is the key, it seems likely that the location was chosen for a statement of status to be visible to the populations of both Mickleton and Overton at the very least.

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The material illustrated is held in the National Monuments Record Centre, Swindon, SN2 2GZ.

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