MOATS AND MOTTES (FIGS. 75–6)

Moated sites are a common feature of the English landscape, and while engaged in a detailed study of the colonization of the Forest of Arden, Warwickshire, before 1350, I became aware of the large number of these sites within Arden and of their possible significance. Consisting of a round, square or sub-rectangular platform surrounded by a wet ditch, moated sites exhibit great variations in size, complexity and distribution. In an analysis of their distribution within Warwickshire the problems were summarized under several headings: chronological, their periods of construction; geographical, their distribution and relation to other forms of settlement; social, the status of their builders; economic, the expenses involved in their construction and maintenance; and finally legal, their precise legal status. This note is concerned with the second heading, the geographical problem of their distribution.

Archaeological evidence from the midlands shows that moated sites range in date from the late 12th to the late 15th century, the majority probably being dug before 1350. It is unlikely that many were built after 1500, although some 18th-century ponds are known to have been constructed in this form. Their distribution within Warwickshire shows that although they were found sporadically in the early-settled southern parts of the county, the Feldon, they appear in greatest density in the late-settled part, Arden, and can reasonably be associated, in view of the archaeological evidence, with the colonization of this region from the 12th to the mid 14th century. Detailed studies of individual parishes based on a wide variety of documentary sources confirm this conclusion, and many moated sites can be proved to be the farmsteads of freehold tenants, set within severalties resulting from the colonization of the waste. Socially such sites range from small farmsteads of sub-tenants in Arden, to manor houses of great lords in both Arden and Feldon. The advantages of the moat as a feature of settlement, particularly pioneer settlement, within certain environments, have been admirably summarized by F. V. Emery, and the evidence from Warwickshire is compatible with his material both in age and interpretation.

From a detailed study of the distribution of moats in one county it was a logical step to compile a map for the whole of England and Wales in an attempt to assess local conclusions on a wider scale. In this note it is intended to present the map (FIG. 75) for the purpose of discussion. It was compiled using the 1-in. maps of the Ordnance Survey (6th and 7th edd.), the accounts of ancient earthworks in the Victoria County Histories, and for Wales the reports of the Royal Commission on Ancient Monuments. Although demonstrably incomplete, it provides a fair picture of the distribution of these sites. For example, a detailed comparison of the cartographic with the documentary and field evidence in a selected sample area, Warwickshire, clearly confirmed that moats were plentiful in Arden, but proportionately fewer in the Feldon.

So that the distributions of our two principal types of medieval earthwork—the moat and the motte—may be compared, D. F. Renn has kindly provided his map of mottes (FIG. 76). The two maps largely speak for themselves, but two points must be borne in mind when considering FIG. 75; first, all moated sites ranging in date from the late 12th to the late 18th century are shown quite indiscriminately, and secondly, considerable variations in form occur. Both distributions reflect the interaction of many complex geographical, social and political factors, and neither distribution can be analysed at length here. Moated sites show a marked preference for heavy clay soils and appear only rarely in areas of limestone, sandstone, and sands and gravels. They occur infrequently in the highland zone. Two areas of exceptionally high density emerge, High Suffolk and Essex, and the Arden-Feckenham area of Warwickshire and Worcestershire. A superficial comparison with the distribution of woodland in 1086,

FIG. 75
DISTRIBUTION OF MOATED SITES IN ENGLAND AND WALES (pp. 219, 222)
FIG. 76
DISTRIBUTION OF MOTTES IN ENGLAND AND WALES (pp. 219, 222)
After D. F. Renn, Antiquity, xxxiii (1959), fig. 3, by courtesy
as shown by the volumes of *Domesday Geography*, tends to confirm the association of moated sites with areas of late colonization, but their frequent appearance elsewhere, even in areas of considerable development in 1086, emphasizes the dangers inherent in arguing purely from such distribution-maps.

One awaits with interest the completion of a 1/625,000 map of moated sites that is being prepared by F. V. Emery which should provide a firmer basis for discussion when it is published. Moated sites, however, pose a particular problem. Many belong to small landowners, sub-tenants, whose estates lacked the highly organized administrative machinery of the larger units, and failed to produce or preserve detailed records. It is only by intensive studies based on counties or smaller units using archaeological, documentary and cartographic evidence that a clear picture will emerge. Work in Warwickshire suggests that a number of lines of enquiry may prove profitable. First, as has already been indicated, the relationship of moated sites to areas of early and late settlement is worth investigating. Secondly, the relationship between moated sites and manors; in Warwickshire, in the majority of cases examined in detail they form the capital messuages of manors, or of freehold estates of sufficient size and complexity to be called sub-manors. Thirdly, the relationship of moated sites to field systems; in Arden they are normally associated with assarted severalties, while in the Feldon, the land of the open field, they often lie in or near a nucleated village, or within a block of enclosed demesne. Fourthly, the considerable differences in form are themselves worthy of close study, as these may reflect variations in date and function. Many moats have associated complexes of fish-ponds. Finally, it should be emphasized that any study of moated sites must be considered as part of the wider study of the forms and patterns of settlement in the British Isles as a whole.

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**RECLAMATION OF WASTE GROUND FOR THE PLEASANCE AT KENILWORTH CASTLE, WARWICKSHIRE**

Before its revision in 1938 Warwickshire sheet xxvi.q o : the 25-in. Ordnance Survey map showed a plan of a rhomboidal moated area, about 220 by 200 yards, lying south of Pleasance Farm, roughly half a mile west of the castle at Kenilworth (SP/267725). This site lay at the W. end and on the N. side of the mere, an artificial lake west of the castle formed in the 12th century and finally drained in 1649. The earthworks, which are still intact, consist of two concentric rhomboidal moats about 40 ft. apart, except on the side of the mere, where the gap is wider. The inner and larger moat (30–40 ft. across), which has a causeway on its N. side, encloses an island of regular rhomb shape (370 ft. along each side) with its corners oriented towards the four cardinal points of the compass. A small excavation in 1923 on the E. corner revealed the base of a spiral staircase in a square tower (10 ft. square inside), and the excavators inferred that the island was enclosed with a wall having a tower at each corner. The inference is supported by reference to a tower or towers in records of repair to the Pleasance in 15th-century Ministers’ Accounts. By far the most conspicuous part of the remains, however, is a very substantial excavation, 100 ft. wide and 270 ft. long, leaving from the former edge of the mere and crossing the outer moat into the enclosure, which was evidently a canal or harbour allowing the Pleasance to be entered by boat. The site is hidden from the castle except at the top of the keep by a rise in the ground. The Pleasance was constructed by Henry V and abandoned in Henry VIII’s reign.

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40 H. C. Darby (ed.). Four volumes of *Domesday Geography* have so far appeared covering Eastern England (1952), Midland England (1954), South-Eastern England (1962), and Northern England (1962).
41 See plan in *The History of the King’s Works* (H.M.S.O., 1963), II, 684.