

HARTLEY COURT MOAT AND ENCLOSURE

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Hartley Court Moat, also known as Harlequin's and Hardicanute's Moat lies close to the north-west margin of Burnham Beeches (NGR SU 94618567) in an area that at the present time is well wooded and includes ancient pollarded beeches, oaks, birches and rhododendrons with patches of bracken and heather in the glades.

An area of 0.6 hectares (1½ acres) is enclosed within the sub-rectangular moat which under normal climatic conditions contains water maintained by the natural water table, there being no evidence for leats. The exceptionally dry summer of 1976, gave an opportunity to probe the silt at several points in order to locate the original bottom, and this is recorded in the profiles.

The interior is surrounded by a continuous bank, broken in the east by the entrance, and in the west by two gaps, the latter probably of much later date than the original occupation of the site. The interior is sub-divided by several banks. No evidence for a dwelling has been found, but a likely location is between the two internal parallel banks protruding from the north side. The inner bank of the moat is slightly higher in this region which would give some protection from northerly winds, and a house sited in this position would have the advantage of a southern aspect.

Near the north-east corner, there is a circular depression in the centre of which is an area about one metre in diameter, the soil being soft to the probe in contrast to the surrounding land which is hard gravel; this is good evidence for the site of a circular well. The ground formation implies that there was a protective structure around the well. The surface in the north-eastern enclosure is somewhat uneven and, if the suggested siting of the house is correct, this is the likely area for other domestic buildings, such as kitchen, brew and bake houses.

There are building platforms in the south-east and south-west corners of the site, and further platforms along the southern margin of the inner enclosure suggest a range of outbuildings.

A slightly raised, elongated band of moss standing out in contrast to the general vegetation, indicates a difference in the subsoil, and, since it lies along a line from the entrance to the gap in the main internal dividing bank, is likely to be a buried road surface. It is difficult to judge if the causeway across the moat is original or a later addition.

The outer enclosure, bounded by a bank and external ditch covers 3.7 hectares (over 9 acres). There are gaps near the north-west, north-east and south-east corners, also at points where McAuliffe Drive passes through the enclosure, these are connected with tracks in existence at the time of the 1875 Ordnance Survey, whereas gaps in the west bank are of more recent origin. At point X, there is a gap differing from the others in that, whilst the bank is missing, the ditch is intact. An area of moss, similar to that already referred to within the moat, can be seen between the moat entrance and McAuliffe Drive, leading in the direction of gap X, indicating a road which passed

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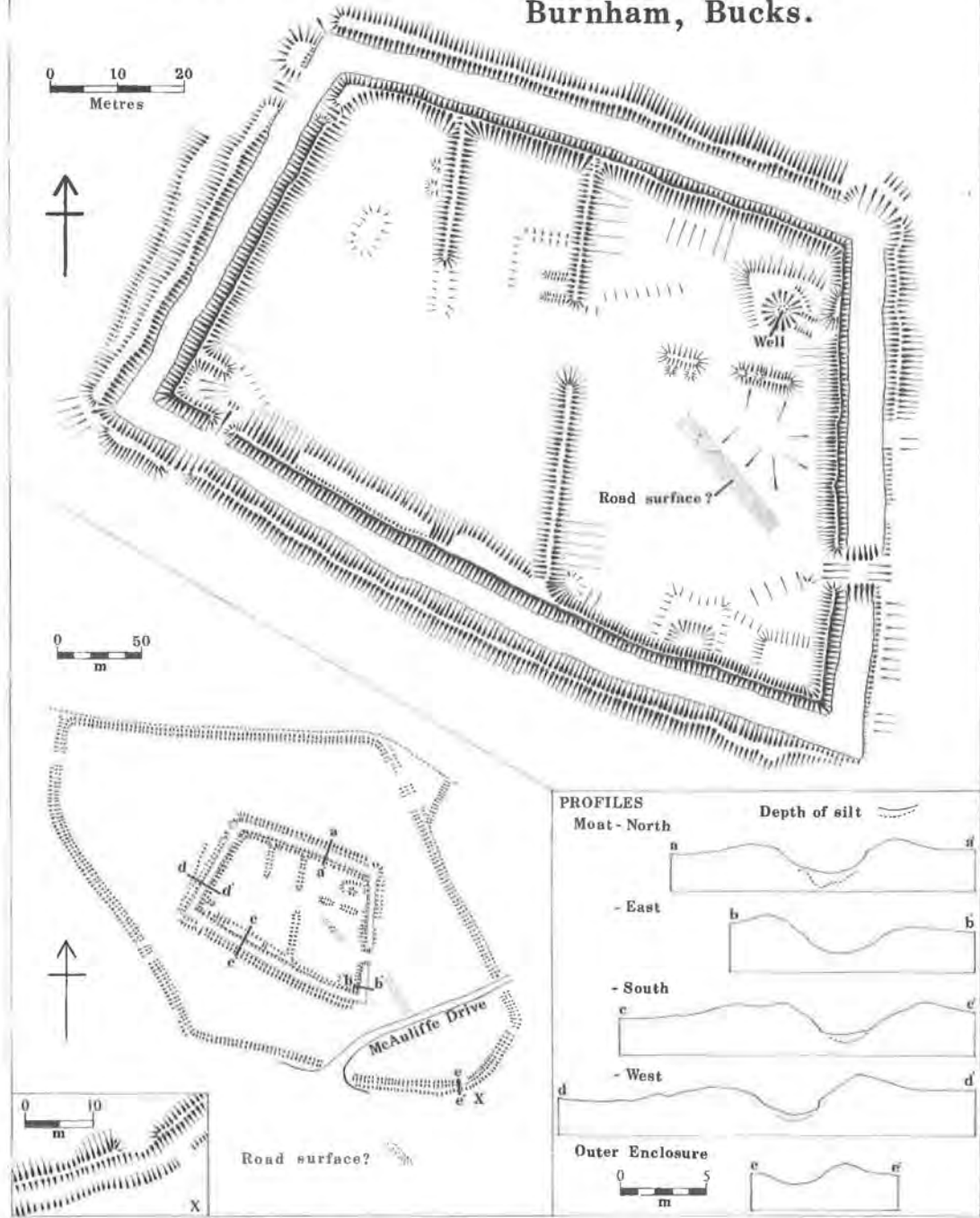


Fig. 1. Hartley Court Moat and Enclosure.

through the gap where one can assume there was a gate and means of crossing the ditch, the road then continuing in the direction of East Burnham, the moat entrance, proposed road surface, gap and East Burnham being on a direct alignment. Unfortunately, probing of the area of the suggested road surface, both within and without the moat was inconclusive. The ground was firm below the moss, but also to either side the probe hit gravel just below the surface and in all parts, there were deeper hollows, probably the result of rotting tree boles.

The ground within the outer enclosure has been so disturbed through the ages that there are few features that can be recognised as associated with the period of occupation. The ditch being external to the bank was designed to keep animals, e.g. deer and swine, out of the enclosure, and the bank would have been surmounted by a pale. It is reasonable to assume that the object was to protect cultivated ground providing produce for the homestead. The ditch is in a better state of preservation where protected by the rhododendron bushes planted at the turn of the century, indicating that deterioration has been rapid in the last seventy-five years.

Moated homesteads are generally thought to date from the 12th to 14 centuries. There are two other moats in the original parish of Burnham which probably date to the 13th century, one at Burnham Abbey has only survived in part, but the other, Cippenham Court Moat, Wood Lane, Slough, is complete. The latter is the likely site of the Manor House of Richard, Earl of Cornwall, where in 1266 A.D., he signed the foundation charter of Burnham Abbey, and among the references to grants made was this clause, 'All the wood which we bought of John de Everengee, which is called la Strete, and a portion of our wood of Hertleigh, as divided by ditch from the wood of la Strete even to the wood of John de la Penne'.¹ The part he retained is referred to as a park call Herleteye in the appurtenances of Cippenham Manor in 1299. There are records of a quarrel in 1596 over rights of common in Abbess Park which is described as extending between Hartley Wood and Court and Pennlands.² In the 17th Century the lands called Hartley Court Moat were included in property owned by the Eyres of East Burnham.³

To the west, within 100 metres of the enclosure is Park Lane, which, together with Green Lane to the south formed the boundary between the parishes of Burnham, and a detached part of Dorney. According to Professor Hoskins, when the name Green Lane occurs in connection with a boundary it can derive from Old English *Gemaere* – boundary lane⁴ and then indicates a Saxon origin; hedge-dating implies that Green Lane was hedged about 650 years ago.

Park Lane is the natural route between Burnham Abbey and its lands lying to the north of Hartley Court and seems to have existed at the time of the construction of the moat and enclosure, and it is of interest that the approach road, instead of joining Park Lane, led in the direction of East Burnham, hinting that it was associated with the manor of Allards in East Burnham from the start, long before the connection with the Eyres.⁵

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1. T.W.E. Roche, *The Precious Blood, A History of Burnham Abbey*, 23.

2. *V.C.H. Bucks*, iii, 167.

3. *Ibid.*

4. W.G. Hoskins, *The Making of the English Landscape*, 238.

5. A.D.C. Le Sueur, *Burnham Beeches and the Manor of Allards in Burnham*.