

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION AT MAIDS MORETON



Excavating the mound at Maids Moreton

In 2014 and 2015, archaeological investigations supervised by Tim Upson-Smith were carried out at a mound at Maids Moreton, a village three kilometres to the north of Buckingham. The purpose of this earthen platform was not clear though it had been mentioned in the Bucks HER as the possible site of a windmill mound. During the 2014 preliminary investigation, pottery dating to the 12th century was recovered, and there was no evidence of building structures on the platform. A geophysical survey of the area proved inconclusive.

Maids Moreton Conservation Group had carried out extensive research into the history of the village and wanted to place the mound into a suitable context. The suggestion is that possibly, the mound had been the site of a manorial building that had been surrounded by a ditch excavated to improve drainage in an area where place names indicate very wet and marshy conditions. A charter of 1265 begins with a description of lands in Moreton parish that had been granted to the Abbey of Osney and that probably relate to the position of the Old Manor House on the site of the mound. The archaeological evidence summarised below indicates that the site was systematically cleared of building materials early in the thirteenth century, a time that coincides with Matthew Stratton, Archdeacon of Buckingham, was supervising land transactions whereby a part of Maids Moreton parish was transferred to Osney Abbey.

The excavations carried out in 1215 comprised an area of 5 square metres in the south east corner of the platform. Five sondages were excavated through a stone surface. The excavations yielded a 190 pottery sherds of mainly mediaeval date, indicating the main period of activity was from the mid 11th to the early thirteenth centuries. The absence of Potterspurty wear which usually occurs in large quantities from the mid thirteenth century on indicates there was little activity and perhaps no occupation in the later mediaeval period. One coin from the reign of Richard I (1189 – 1199) was found. There were also two knives of mediaeval date. Of building materials, there were recovered ten limestone roof tiles and seven fragments of thick green glazed tiles. The date range of the tiles is 1250 to 1350, and they are suggestive of a site of manorial status.

All this makes clear that the platform had its origins in the 11th century and that occupation of the site ended in the earlier part of the thirteenth century. Documentary evidence suggests Maids Moreton had three manor houses one of which may have been short lived. It is reasonable to hypothesise that the platform may be the site of the missing manor. There are indications that structural remains of a building survive on the platform, and that the building was demolished and the building material removed for use elsewhere. The site had been covered by a loose layer of limestone hard core; no finds post-dating the thirteenth century were found, and the site seems to have reverted to pasture, and never subject to disturbance by arable activity. In sum, the archaeological excavation carried out in 2015 suggests the platform was constructed for a short lived higher status building. All this seems to suggest a link with the evidence culled from documentary sources that point to the demolition of a manor house on the site and the re-use elsewhere of the building material.

Copies of the Maids Moreton excavations booklet are on sale at the Buckingham Old Gaol for £2.00.

Summary from the report compiled by Tim Upson-Smith

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