CHAPTER 4

THE MOATED HOUSE

I MOATED SITES IN ENGLAND

One of the problems in trying to trace the ancestry of the country house is that, in many cases, its medieval predecessors continued to be occupied into the post-medieval period, and continual reconstruction obliterates all evidence of earlier occupation. It is often only possible to recover such evidence from sites abandoned in the medieval period, and these would of course be very difficult to identify in the absence of documentary evidence or of substantial earthworks. Fortunately, however, it was common practice in the medieval period for wealthier homesteads to be surrounded by a water-filled moat. Such features not only serve to identify abandoned sites but act also as a focal point for the archaeologist in the study of the wider medieval landscape.

It was Hadrian Allcroft, in his 'Earthwork of England' (1908), who first studied the moated homestead as a discrete class of archaeological monument. His survey remained the only authoritative work on the subject until a paper published by F V Emery in 1962 once again reviewed the evidence for moated settlements in England and re-opened the debate on their origins, functions, social status and date. Emery's general paper was followed by more intensive studies of the West Midlands (Roberts 1962, 1965) Cambridgeshire (Taylor 1972) and Yorkshire (Le Patourel 1972, 1973), and the increasing interest in the subject culminated in 1972 in the formation of the Moated Sites Research Group (MSRG). Since that time, the MSRG has co-ordinated and stimulated research on moated sites through the production of a pro-forma field record card, the publication of reports and bibliographies, the formulation of research priorities and the organisation of a continuing series of regional and national conferences. The MSRG has also produced the two standard works on medieval moated sites in this country (Aberg 1978), and in the wider context of North-Western Europe (Aberg and Brown 1981).

Number and Distribution

In 1962, Emery estimated that there were some 3500 moated homesteads in England. Some measure of the intensity of recent research is reflected in the fact that by 1981 the total of known sites had risen to over 6000. Whilst further sites undoubtedly await discovery, it seems unlikely that the overall total will much exceed this figure.

The national distribution of moated sites is uneven. Very few sites (ie fewer than 4 per 100 sq km) are found in South West England and the border counties, whereas dense concentrations occur in East Anglia and the West Midlands. There is a general, though not invariable, preference for low-lying areas - typically below about 60m OD. Moated sites tend to be concentrated on impervious subsoils such as boulder clays and marls, if for no other reason than that moat construction on permeable soils is both difficult and expensive.

Local distribution is also variable, and may be governed by a variety of topographical or environmental factors. The apparently contradictory requirements of drainage and water-supply, for example, may best be fulfilled by selecting a valley-side or spur location, free from the inconvenience of waterlogging and yet providing a water-supply both for domestic use and moat construction. Thus, riverine sites were particularly favoured, and so too were the spring-lines which tend to occur at the interface of permeable and impermeable soils.

Le Patourel (1973) has shown that moated sites in Yorkshire are found in arable rather than pastoral areas. This is partly because pastoralism tends of course to predominate in those upland areas which, until the post-medieval period, were considered of marginal economic importance. The correlation of moated sites and arable areas may therefore be merely an expression of a general preference for the environmental regimen - soil, climate, vegetation - prevailing in the lowlands. There is a danger, too, in assuming that modern land use too accurately reflects that of the medieval period.

Land tenure may also have had a significant influence on the local distribution of moated sites. Both Emery (1962) and Roberts (1962, 1965) have drawn attention to a correlation in the West Midlands between moat distribution and those areas, such as the Forest of Arden, where colonisation of forest and waste did not take place until the Saxo-Norman period. Thus the areas of primary Saxon colonisation - the 'Champion' lands, where a settlement pattern of nucleated villages and arable open fields was already well established by Domesday - are largely devoid of moated sites. By contrast, the areas of piecemeal secondary colonisation or 'assarting' characterised by dispersed farmsteads and sparse settlements at Domesday- are rich in moated sites. However, Taylor (1972) in Cambridgeshire and Le Patourel (1973) in Yorkshire have shown that this West Midlands model cannot be universally applied.

The relationship between moated site distribution and parish boundaries may also be of significance. A single parish may contain one, two or several moated sites, centrally or peripherally placed within its boundaries, and it seems likely that the distribution pattern (which may of course have developed over centuries rather than decades) reflects a complex of social and tenurial factors.

Form

Taylor (1978, 5) has defined the moated site as

'an area of ground, often occupied by a dwelling or associated structure, bounded or partly bounded by a wide ditch, which in most cases was intended to be filled with water, the whole usually dating from the later medieval period'.

In its simplest and most typical form, the moated site consists of a square or rectangular platform, 2-5000 square metres in area, surrounded by a single water-filled moat 5 metres or more in overall width. Many variations on this basic theme occur - platforms may be triangular, circular or irregular in plan, may vary from a few 100 square metres to several hectares in area, and may be only partially moated or surrounded by multiple concentric or conjoining moats - but these variants probably represent less than 10% of known examples (Aberg 1978).

4.1 **Gidlow Hall** Aspull

In profile, the moat ditch is normally 'U' shaped, and encloses either a level platform or one raised above the level of the surrounding area through the dumping of upcast material during digging of the moat. An alternative method of disposing of the upcast was to dump it as low banks along the inside or outside edge of the moat, although such features, where found, might just as easily represent fence or hedge-lines, or result from periodic scouring of the moat.

Access to the platform would originally have been provided by a wooden, or more rarely a stone, bridge. The causeways which are often visible today usually date from a later period, when defence was no longer a primary consideration.

Very few moated sites retain their original buildings, most platforms either being empty or occupied by more recent structures. Rigold (1978) has distinguished several classes of building, but concludes that the great majority are domestic buildings of square or rectangular plan, more or less conforming to the plan of the encircling moat. Ancillary buildings are normally agricultural - barn, dovecote, granary, stables etc - and are usually located outside the moat or more rarely within an adjoining moat, as a sort of basecourt. It seems likely that in many cases these external buildings represent later 'overspill' from the platform, brought about by the gradual expansion of the house itself to occupy the entire platform area.

It should perhaps also be noted that there exist a number of well-documented examples of wholly unoccupied platforms. Le Patourel (1978) has suggested that such sites might have been used as gardens or orchards, that their 'moats' were in fact fishponds, or indeed that they may represent unfinished moated homesteads.

A variety of earthwork features occur in association with moated sites. They include features relating to water management - such as dams, leets, sluices, fishponds and millraces; agriculture - such as orchards, paddocks and open fields; and settlement - such as tofts, holloways and deserted villages. However, it is often only by excavation that contemporaneity between the moat and such features can be established.

In many cases moated sites are known only from documentary sources, and even where surviving their condition may range from the partially or entirely levelled earthwork to the rare and cherished examples still inhabited today. In addition, many have been drained by modern land management techniques. Moated sites are as likely to suffer from changes in landuse as any other class of archaeological monument - indeed perhaps more so, since relatively few receive statutory protection.

Excavation of moated sites has been very limited. In 1978 Le Patourel listed 120 excavations, of which only 30 were extensive. Traditionally such work has confined itself to limited investigation of the platform and one or two sections through dry portions of the moat. In recent years, however, there has been an increased emphasis on area excavation outside the moat. Correspondingly fewer moat sections are being excavated, if only because it has been demonstrated that the practice of regular scouring of the moat tends to leave little trace of primary deposits.

A number of systems have been devised for the classification of moated sites. These have been based variously on their topographic setting, area, complexity and shape, but none has been proved satisfactory - often because they cannot take account of the fact that most moated sites are multiperiod. As Taylor (1978, 12) has pointed out, the best basis for classification is probably by social status and date, both of which regrettably require a high level of excavation and documentary research to establish.

Function

The most obvious reason for constructing a moat is for defensive purposes. It is clear, however, that such a feature would present little obstacle in the face of sustained assault. It should therefore probably be viewed rather as a security measure against the kind of casual brigandage, inter-family feuding, and peasant unrest which characterised the late medieval period. In this general climate of lawlessness, medieval large houses were almost invariably enclosed in some way - whether by

bank, paling, hedge, wall, wet or dry moat, or some combination of these. The construction of a substantial wall would, in many cases, require a royal 'Licence to Crenellate' and in the absence of this the choice of enclosure-type was probably dictated by wealth, raw material and, in the case of the wet moat, by the underlying geology of the site.

There are reasons, however, for believing that security was not the only consideration in moat building. A number of sites, for example, are only moated on two or three sides; others have permanent causeways, whilst a great many did not take the obvious measure of raising the platform height with moat upcast. There are instances, too, where a readily defensible site is ignored in favour of more mundane considerations, such as access and water supply.

Apart from defence, a moat may serve several purposes. Fish was an important element in the medieval economy, and most moats would probably have been stocked as fishponds. Site drainage could be improved by construction of a moat, but it is clear that great efforts were often made to create a wet moat where a dry one would have been equally effective. It is often suggested too that the moat provided a ready water-supply, although this would presumably be for livestock only, since the moat would probably receive cess and other refuse from the house platform. The moat may also have provided protection against both woodland fire and predators, although it seems probable that even if a site was originally constructed in woodland, large-scale clearance of the surrounding area would rapidly take place. All of these considerations, however, should probably be regarded as benefits of moat construction, rather than determining factors.

One further reason for moat construction should perhaps be mentioned - the desire for social prestige. The moat was a potent expression of social status, and became fashionable at a time when wealth was beginning to permeate downwards through society to a level below that of the traditional castle-building gentry. Moat building may therefore be seen as an attempt by an emergent landowning class to imitate its social superiors and, at the same time, to separate itself both socially and physically from the lower ranks of society.

Dating

The chronology of moated sites is still inexact. This is partly because relatively few controlled excavations have been undertaken, and partly because, as Le Patourel (1978, 7) has pointed out, a high proportion of those sites that have been excavated are of seigniorial status, and are therefore likely to be of earlier date than the majority of submanorial sites. Nevertheless, Le Patourel and Roberts (1978) have provided a broad chronological framework which distinguishes five phases of development.

Phase I, the 'evolutionary' phase, was the period before 1150. During this period, several types of defensive earthwork were in use, of which three - the late Saxon 'burh' and the early Norman 'motte-and-bailey' and 'ringwork' - may be considered possible ancestors to the moated site. The rare examples of circular moats with pronounced internal banks bear a particular resemblance to ringworks, and may indeed provide a link between the two traditions. However, even if such a lineage is accepted, it remains possible that the transition took place not in England but on the continent, where the entire chronology may be as much as fifty years in advance of that in England (Le Patourel and Roberts, 1978). In considering the theory of diffusion from the continent it is perhaps instructive to look at the example of Ireland, where the distribution of moated sites is significantly confined to the area of Anglo-Norman colonisation (Barry 1981).

The 'innovatory' Phase II lasted from about 1150 to 1200, and saw the earliest examples of moated sites being established. The political troubles of the early Angevin period led to severe limitations being placed upon private castle building, and the moat may well have gained popularity during this period as an effective defensive measure requiring no royal licence.

Phase III, the 'expansion' phase, spanned the period 1200 to 1325 and was the floruit of moat construction in England. The newly-created agricultural wealth of this period gave rise to moat building, not only as a manifestation of wealth but also as a protection for its more moveable trappings. At this time the moat as stronghold had given way to the moat as security measure.

Phase IV, the 'decline' phase, lasted from about 1325 to 1500. During this period the 'domestication' process continued. Population pressure and land hunger decreased and the moat idea began to become superfluous and unfashionable, at least at the submanorial level - although Le Patourel (1982) has shown that the fortification of manor houses reached a peak during the 14th century.

After about 1500 came the 'adaptation and revival' phase, Phase V. This period saw the widespread abandonment of moated sites, both as a consequence of Tudor enclosure (like many villages) and as a response to changing needs and fashions. The moat was by nature a restrictive feature, and the successful Tudor yeoman or merchant had more expansive tastes than his medieval predecessor. In addition, of course, many moated sites had been occupied continuously for decades, and were no doubt beginning to develop functional and structural defects. The most common response was to abandon the moated site and to establish a new residence - often using materials from the abandoned site - some distance away. More rarely, the moat might be drained and backfilled, and a new and larger building erected on the site. Often an abandoned moat became a feature in the formal gardens of its 'country house' successor - indeed Taylor (1972) has suggested that this might have been the ancestry of the English water garden

tradition of the 16th and 17th centuries. Whether or not this is so, it is clear that the country house of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries can be seen as the direct descendent of the medieval moated homestead, and the culmination of a tradition whose origins may be traced back to the Norman Conquest.

Status

Moated homesteads may be divided, on the basis of social status, into two broad categories - seigniorial and submanorial.

The seigniorial site was the manor house or 'capital messuage' of the lord of the manor - who might be a baron, a knight, or a senior member of the clergy, and who might be the holder of several manors. Such sites were usually located in the centre of the parish, often in close proximity to the parish church and village nucleus, and were often (though not invariably) larger and more complex than their submanorial counterparts.

Submanorial moated sites were largely occupied by franklins, merchants, and the cadet branches of seigniorial families (Le Patourel, 1978), and as suggested above, it was for this class that the moat held its greatest attraction as a symbol of social aspiration. The franklins were an emergent class of wealthy freemen; an agricultural middle-class whose newly acquired wealth allowed them to become small-scale landowners through the gradual fragmentation of the large baronial estates during the late medieval period. This process of subdivision was compounded by the fact that the minor branches of the established seigniorial families were themselves beginning to become independent owners of submanorial estates.

Many of these 'new' landowners acquired marginal land holdings through assarting of the waste and woodlands - hence the tendency for their homesteads to be situated away from established villages, often around the periphery of the parish. Since they were a reflection of the spread of wealth, it follows that submanorial sites were more numerous than ones of manorial status: a typical parish might, for example, contain a single central manor house, and four or five submanorial 'satellites' distributed around the boundary. It should be remembered, however, that such distributions are usually the result of gradual, piecemeal development, and that the submanorial sites, even if themselves contemporaneous, are likely to post-date the seigniorial site. Furthermore, this simple distribution may be the result of more complex factors. A simple parish may, for example, contain more than one seigniorial site, suggesting tenurial division, perhaps at an early date. Regional differences may also be observed: Emery (1962), for example, has argued that the multiplicity of small moated sites in Eastern England may correspond to a specific type of fragmentary land tenure at Domesday, known as 'socage'; Le Patourel (1973) however, sees no such correlation in Yorkshire.

2 MOATED SITES IN GREATER MANCHESTER

Number and Distribution

There are perhaps as many as 70 moated sites in Greater Manchester. They are listed by township in Table II, and their distribution is shown in Figure 4.1.

For the purpose of this paper I have distinguished between 'certain' sites, of which there are 48, and 'possible' sites, of which there are 22. The 'certain' category includes those with extant moats, those which are clearly depicted on OS First Edition 6" maps, those for which there is unequivocal documentary evidence, (such as Pool Fold **46**), and those (such as Denton Hall **53**, Radcliffe Tower **65**, and Castle Croft, Bury **66**) which came to light through excavation. To the 'possible' category I have consigned all those sites for which there is only vague or insubstantial documentary evidence, and a few (such as Bradshaw Hall **23** and Barlow Hall **48**), with extant earthworks of dubious origin. The fact that several sites have been recognised as moated only through excavation suggests that the present figure of 70 may be a significant underestimate of the original number of moated sites in the county, and also that the practice of backfilling moats in the early post-medieval period may have been quite widespread.

As can be seen in Figure 4.1 the distribution of sites is predominantly westerly, and is most concentrated in the Wigan and Leigh area - indeed nearly half of the total lie within the metropolitan district of Wigan. The density of sites ranges from 0-8 per 100 sq km in the east and centre of the county, to 12-16 per 100 sq km in the west - the latter representing a 'moderate density' on the criterion of Le Patourel and Roberts (1978).

In Figure 4.2, the distribution of sites is shown in relation to relief and drainage. It may be seen that no sites occur above the 152m contour, while no less than 55 (79%) occur on or below the 76m contour. This is clearly a significant distribution, since only 36% of the county lies below this contour: thus the density of sites in the lowlands is more than twice that expected of a random distribution.

In Figure 4.3, the distribution of sites is shown in relation to surface geology. 51 sites (73%) occur on boulder clay, while the remaining 19 occur on river terrace deposits, alluvium and glacial sands and gravels. This is again a significant distribution, since boulder clay covers only 44% of the area of the county.

The distribution of moated sites in Greater Manchester therefore conforms closely to the national distribution in showing a marked preference for low-lying areas on impermeable subsoils. The wider significance of this distribution is discussed more fully below.

Form

The vast majority of moated sites in the county are of the most rudimentary form: a small,

TABLE II

MOATED SITES IN GREATER MANCHESTER

CERTAIN SITES
Possible Sites

Site No.	Site Name, Township	N.G.R.	Condition (of moat)
1	MOSSLEY HALL, Lowton	SJ 628 990	Partially visible
2	Byrom Hall, Lowton	SJ 624 989	Destroyed
3	LIGHTSHAW HALL, Golborne	SJ 615 996	Destroyed
4	OLD BRYN, Ashton-in-Makerfield	SD 578 015	Destroyed
5	BRYN HALL, Ashton-in-Makerfield	SD 588 017	Destroyed
6	WINSTANLEY MOAT, Winstanley	SD 543 035	Extant, wet
7	TUNSTED HOUSE, Pemberton	SD 556 047	Destroyed
8	HALL WORSLEY, Pemberton	SD 563 050	Destroyed
9	Hawkley Hall, Pemberton	SD 575 031	Destroyed
10	WIGAN HALL/RECTORY, Wigan	SD 579 059	Destroyed
11	PEEL HALL, Ince-in-Makerfield	SD 598 057	Destroyed
12	NEW HALL, Ince-in-Makerfield	SD 604 053	Destroyed
13	Hall of Ince, Ince-in-Makerfield	SD 600 058	Destroyed
14	BAMFURLONG HALL, Abram	SD 601 016	Partially visible
15	ABRAM HALL, Abram	SD 606 014	Partially visible
16	BOLTON HOUSE, Abram	SD 626 013	Destroyed
17	BICKERSHAW HALL, Abram	SD 627 019	Destroyed
18	PLATT BRIDGE MOAT, Hindley	SD 613 029	Destroyed
19	LOWE HALL, Hindley	SD 607 033	Partially visible
20	KIRKLESS HALL, Aspull	SD 603 064	Destroyed
21	GIDLOW HALL, Aspull	SD 625 071	Extant, wet
22	LOWER HIGHFIELD/MANOR HOUSE, Aspull	SD 607 080	Partially visible
23	Bradshaw Hall, Aspull	SD 618 069	Partially visible
24	MOAT/DAM HOUSE, Haigh	SD 600 091	Partially visible
25	LANGTREE HALL, Standish with Langtree	SD 561 111	Partially visible
26	Langtree Hall West, Standish with Langtree	SD 552 121	Destroyed
27	Standish Hall, Standish with Langtree	SD 557 089	Destroyed
28	ARLEY HALL, Blackrod	SD 589 107	Extant, wet
29	LEE HALL FARM, Westhoughton	SD 665 056	Destroyed
30	LANGLEY HALL FARM, Westhoughton	SD 667 047	Destroyed
31	Peel Hall, Little Hulton	SD 719 034	Destroyed
32	PARSONAGE FARM, Westleigh	SD 651 015	Destroyed
33	Westleigh Old Hall, Westleigh	SD 648 008	Destroyed

TABLE II cont.

34	URMSTON I' TH' MEADOWS, Pennington	SJ 637 988	Destroyed
35	HOPECARR HALL, Bedford	SJ 665 987	Partially visible
36	BRICK HOUSE, Bedford	SJ 670 991	Destroyed
37	MORLEY'S HALL, Astley	SJ 690 993	Extant, wet
38	NEW HALL, Tyldesley with Shakerley	SD 699 011	Extant, wet
39	OLD HALL, Worsley	SD 742 010	Destroyed
40	WARDLEY HALL, Worsley	SD 758 022	Partially visible
41	BARTON OLD HALL, Barton	SJ 754 979	Destroyed
42	Shawe Hall, Flixton	SJ 753 939	Destroyed
43	New Croft, Urmston	SJ 779 943	Destroyed
44	Agecroft Hall, Pendlebury	SD 801 017	Destroyed
45	ORDSALL HALL, Salford	SJ 817 970	Destroyed
46	POOL FOLD/RADCLIFFE HALL, Manchester	SJ 840 984	Destroyed
47	CLAYTON HALL, Droylsden	SJ 881 986	Extant, wet
48	Barlow Hall, Chorlton-cum-Hardy	SJ 822 921	Partially visible
49	WITHINGTON OLD HALL, Withington	SJ 841 937	Destroyed
50	Birch Hall, Rusholme	SJ 861 947	Destroyed
51	PEEL MOAT, Heaton Norris	SJ 875 925	Extant, dry; SAM
52	REDDISH HALL, Reddish	SJ 898 933	Destroyed
53	DENTON HALL, Denton	SJ 914 947	Destroyed
54	ARDEN HALL, Bredbury	SJ 919 933	Partially visible
55	BROADOAK FARM, Torkington	SJ 939 876	Extant, wet; SAM
56	PEEL HALL, Northern Etchells	SJ 837 868	Extant, wet
57	Baguley Hall, Baguley	SJ 817 886	Destroyed
58	Wythenshawe Hall, Northenden	SJ 816 898	Destroyed
59	RIDDINGS HALL, Timperley	SJ 779 897	Destroyed
60	TIMPERLEY HALL FARM, Altrincham	SJ 777 881	Extant, wet
61	BUTTERY HOUSE FARM, Hale	SJ 802 866	Partially visible
62	Dunham Massey Hall, Dunham Massey	SJ 735 874	Destroyed
63	Warburton Park, Warburton	SJ 702 902	Partially visible
64	Smithills Hall, Halliwell	SD 699 119	Destroyed
65	RADCLIFFE TOWER, Radcliffe	SD 796 075	Destroyed
66	CASTLE CROFT, Bury	SD 803 108	Destroyed
67	Old Hall, Middleton	SD 871 059	Destroyed
68	Old Rectory, Middleton	SD 869 063	Destroyed
69	Ashworth Hall, Ashworth	SD 850 132	Destroyed
70	Clegg Hall, Milnrow	SD 922 145	Destroyed

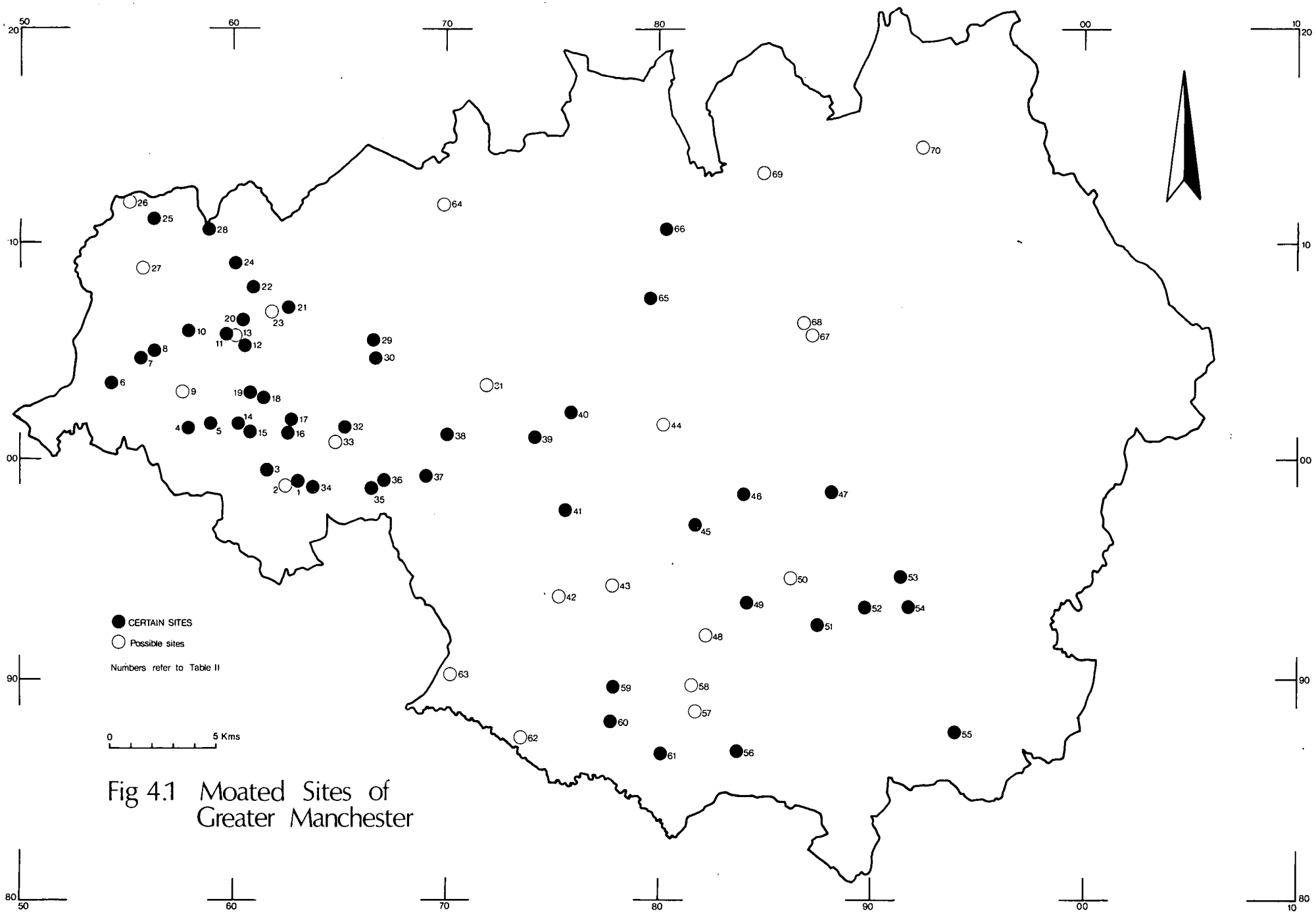

Fig 4.1 Moated Sites of Greater Manchester

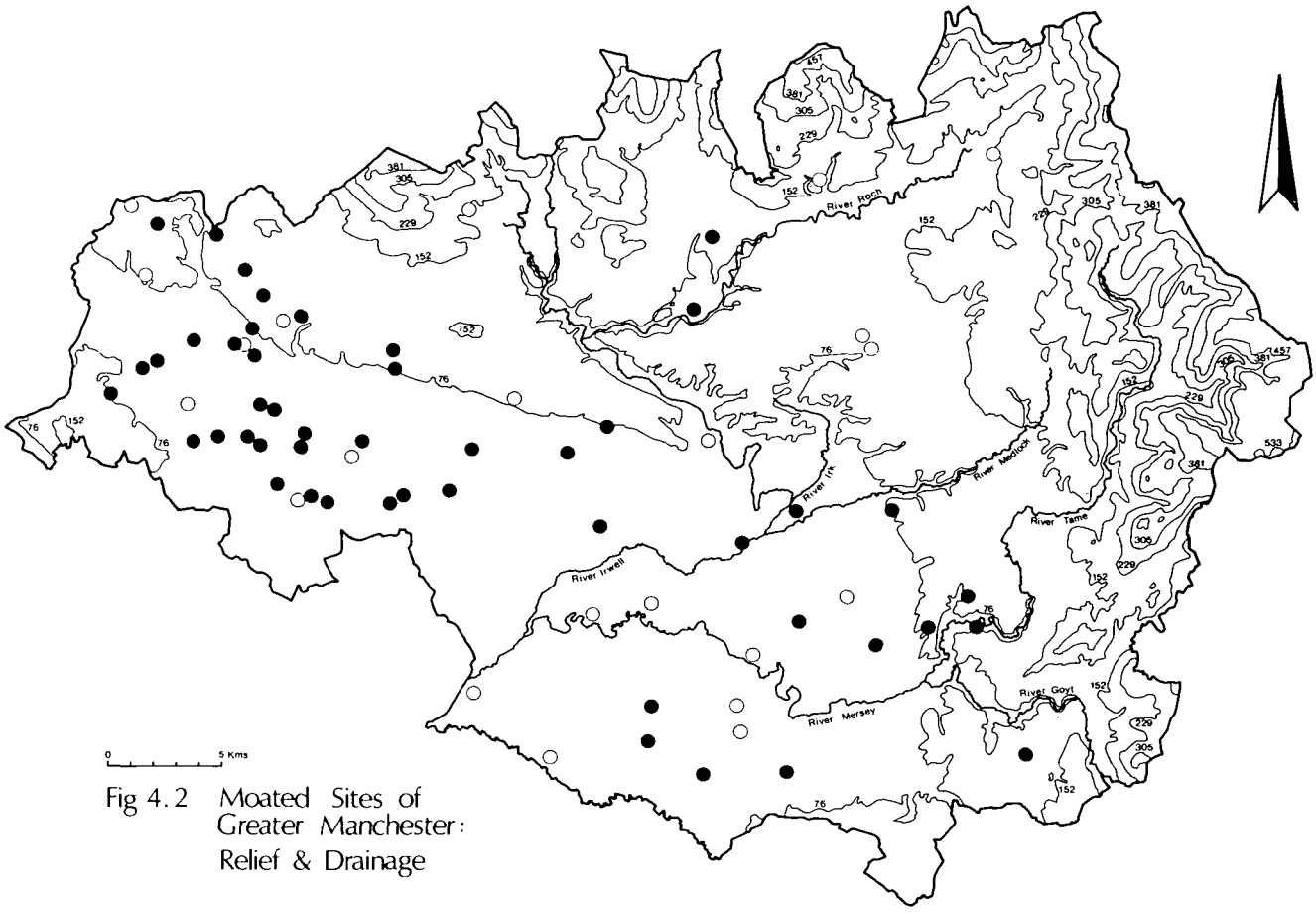

Fig 4.2 Moated Sites of Greater Manchester: Relief & Drainage

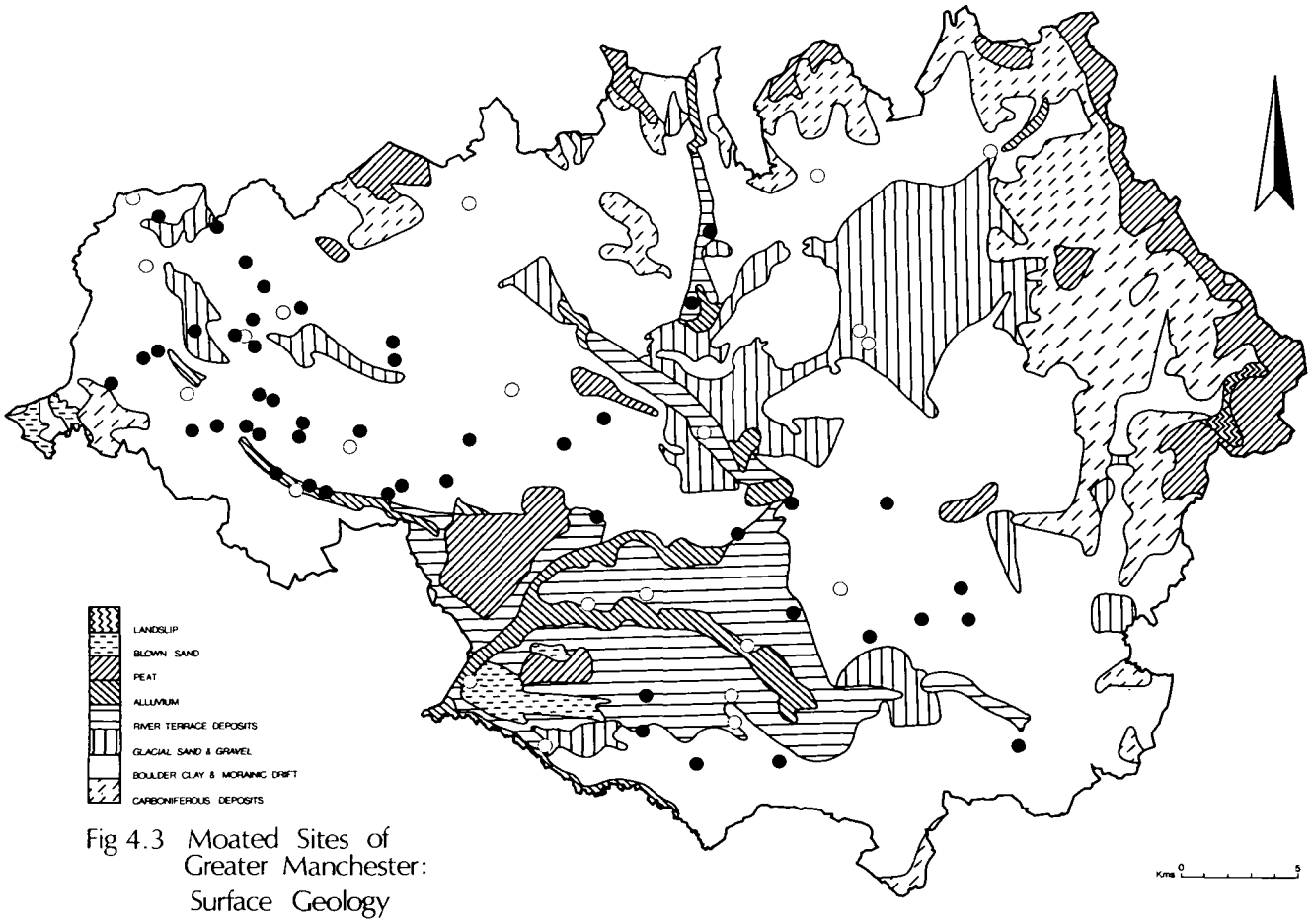

Fig 4.3 Moated Sites of Greater Manchester: Surface Geology

square or slightly rectangular platform, surrounded by a single moat. The exceptions include the oval plans at Hall Worsley **8**, Peel Hall, Ince **11**, and Barton Old Hall **41**, and the roughly circular ones at Arley Hall **28**, Lee Hall Farm **29**, Brick House **36**, and, if an engraving of c 1650 is to be believed (Figure 4), Pool Fold. Only two possible examples of double, or conjoined, moats are known: Bamfurlong Hall **14** and Hopecarr Hall **35**. It does not appear that the proportion of such variants in Greater Manchester is significantly different from the 10% national estimate made by Aberg (1978), although it may be noted that the examples in Greater Manchester largely represent minor variations on a basic theme, and the overall picture remains one of pragmatic uniformity.

The size of platform ranges from less than 1000 sq m in area, (as at Bickershaw Hall **17**, Peel Moat **51**, Peel Hall, Ince, and Lee Hall Farm), to those, such as Lightshaw Hall **3** and Wardley Hall **40**, with areas in excess of 0.5 hectares. Over half the sites are between 1000 and 2000 square metres in area, and 95% are less than 0.5 hectares.

Moats are generally in the range 8-12 m wide, although as Harrop (1983) has suggested, there is a tendency for Cheshire examples to be marginally wider than those in Lancashire and elsewhere, and to exhibit frequently a distinctive 'bulge' at one corner (Harrop 1979). The latter feature may be seen at Broadoak Farm **55** and Wardley Hall, but need not necessarily be primary in either case. Wilson (1982) has shown also that many Cheshire moats have raised or mounded platforms, and whilst this is seen at Peel Hall, Northern Etchells **56**, and Broadoak Farm, the practice is less common north of the Mersey: Old Bryn **4**, Morley's Hall **37** and Bamfurlong Hall being possible examples.

By far the most widely favoured location for sites is 'perched' on the lower slopes of gentle hillocks and spurs. They are almost invariably spring-fed, and little obvious effort is made to manage the water-supply, apart perhaps from the construction of overflow channels to nearby streams: as for example at Old Bryn. The almost total absence of both water-management features in particular and of ancillary earthworks in general could be more apparent than real: resulting from the highly intensive post-medieval land management practices to which most of the county has been subjected.

There is similarly little evidence of the original means of access at each site - since most display, if anything at all, such clearly secondary features as brick or earthen causeways. A number of examples possessed late medieval sandstone bridges, including Bryn Hall **5**, Ordsall **45**, Clayton **47**, Arden **54**, Morley's, Wardley and Peel Hall, Northern Etchells. Even these, however, must be considered secondary features: probably displacing timber predecessors. The only evidence for such a feature comes from a late 18th century description of Pool Fold, Manchester (Figure 4.4).

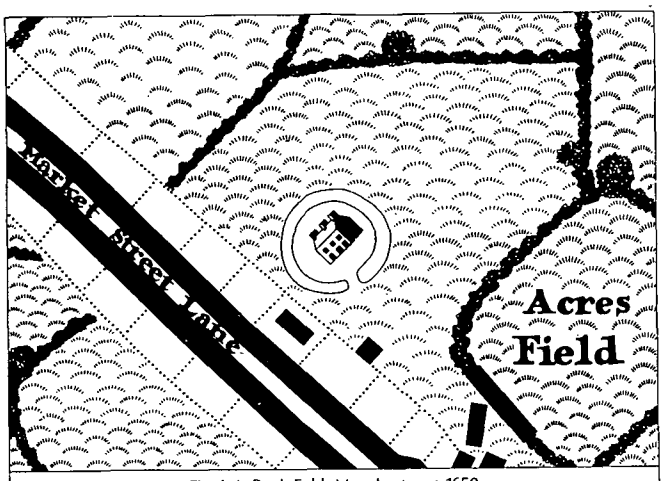

Fig 4.4 Pool Fold, Manchester, c 1650

> 'An old house in Pool-Fold, now converted into two public houses, was the seat of a Ratcliff in the reign of Charles I, at which time it was surrounded by a moat with a draw bridge. The posts and chains were taken away, and probably the moat filled up, about 1672'.
>
> Aiken (1795, 207)

The bridges at Bryn, Wardley and Ordsall halls were guarded by gate-houses - again presumably of late medieval date - the example at Ordsall Hall being described as 'embattled' (Taylor, 1884, 67n.). Stone revetments to one or both sides of the moat were also common and, although they too may represent later refinements, the excavated example at Broadoak Farm appears to be primary (Yendley, 1983).

There are, quite predictably, no surviving examples of original buildings, although it seems likely that in many cases parts of such buildings may have been incorporated within the fabric of their late medieval successors. We have for the most part to rely upon a very few documentary references to the type of building enclosed by the moat.

The Cheshire Forest Proceedings of 1363 record that one John de Legh had, c 1354:

> 'taken in and cleared sixty acres of royal woodland and built a hall of two chambers and a kitchen, moated, and outside the moat a barn, stables, wards, etc.'
>
> Dodgson (1970, 299)

The site in question, Broadoak Farm, is now empty, although a sizeable farm still occupies the position of the original farm buildings, outside the moat. The platform was partially excavated in 1976, and produced evidence of sill-walls, stone-packed post-holes and possible hearths, together with a small assemblage of medieval lead-glazed pottery and roof-tile, consistent with the date suggested by the documentary evidence (Yendley, 1983).

A similar picture emerges from a Sheriff's account of the manor of Worsley in 1376. Worsley Old Hall **39** is described therein as:

> ' a house with hall, chamber, chapel,

kitchen, etc; there (is) a **forcelletum** called the Peel, a water-mill and various lands, messuages and wood etc.'

V.C.H. (1911, vol 4, 379n)

An early 15th century extent of the manor refers specifically to 'the manor place with its moat, the chapel, great barn, etc.' (ibid.)

Despite the use of the term 'manor', neither Broadoak nor Worsley need be considered of the highest social rank, and their descriptions may be contrasted with that of the moated 'demesne farm' of Ordsall Hall, given in an Inquistion Post Mortem of Richard de Radcliffe in 1380. It is described as:

'a hall with five chambers, kitchen, chapel, two stables, three granges, two shippons, garner (worth nothing), dovecote (worth 2s a year), orchard (12d), windmill (6s 8d), 80 acres of arable land (£4) and 6 acres of meadow (6s)'. (ibid. 211n)

In many cases, the oldest documented building on the moat platform clearly belongs to a secondary or even a tertiary phase. Thus there are numerous references to 'wood and plaster' or 'black and white' buildings, occasionally re-faced in brick, and apparently dating mainly between the mid 15th and the late 16th centuries. Perhaps the most vivid description of such a building is given by Leland, writing of Morley's Hall in the 1530's:

'Morle in (West) Darbyshire, Mr Leland's Place, is buildid - saving the foundation of stone squarid that risith within a great Moote a vi Foote above the Water - al of Tymbre, after the commune sort of building of Houses of the Gentilmen for most of Lancastreshire. Ther is as much Pleasur of Orchardes of great varite of Frute and fair made Walkes and Gardines as ther is in any Place of Lancastreshire'.

V.C.H. (1907, vol 3, 447n)

4.2 **Morley's Hall** Astley

Original external buildings likewise do not survive, but in several instances a modern farm clearly occupies the same site as a medieval predecessor - as for example at Gidlow Hall **21**, Langtree Hall **25**, Morley's and Broadoak.

Seven excavations have been carried out on moated sites within the county, none of which has been extensive. Excavations over the last decade by local societies at Denton Hall, Bury Castle and Radcliffe Tower (above, chapter 3), demonstrated the existence of previously unsuspected moats, while work by Manchester University at Ordsall Hall in 1978-9 (Higham 1980a, 1980b), and by the Greater Manchester Archaeological Unit at Peel Hall, Northern Etchells in 1981 (above, chapter 3), was restricted to post-medieval levels. Mention has already been made of the work at Broadoak Farm (Yendley, 1983; above, chapter 3), where a narrow transect across the platform and moat edge was excavated with some success in 1976. By far the most extensive excavation of a moated site, however, was that carried out at Buttery House Farm, Hale **61** between 1977 and 1980 (Wilson, 1980, 1983). The excavator discerned five phases of occupation of the platform, of which only the first two were pre - 19th century. The earlier of these was a post-built structure, of uncertain plan but probably medieval in date; the later was again post-built and was probably identifiable with a 'black and white' structure reputed to have occupied the site until the 19th century. Other features included a late medieval storm ditch and a post-medieval saw-pit and wattle-lined pond. The moat itself contained no medieval levels, but pottery from the platform spanned the period 12th or 13th century - 20th century, suggesting more or less continuous occupation of the site.

The present condition of the county's moated sites is given in Table 4.1. Of the total 70 sites, no fewer than 46 (66%) have been destroyed, mostly since the completion of the OS First Edition 6" map of 1845-8. Of the remaining 24, 14 are at least partially visible and 10 are fully extant, of which 9 are water-filled. Only two sites in the county - Peel Moat and Broadoak Farm - are Scheduled Ancient Monuments, although a number of others contain Listed Buildings.

Function

There is little reason to suppose that the function of moats in the Manchester area differed in any way from that suggested elsewhere. General lawlessness and family feuding were as endemic to 14th century Lancashire and Cheshire as to the rest of the country, and there are numerous documentary references to thefts, assaults, affrays and murders, most frequently involving the principle landowning families and their retainers (see for example Porteus, 1941-2; Harrop, 1983). The sense of security provided by a moat is well illustrated by a deed of 1300, granting to Henry de Childres the land and house at Peel Hall, Ince, to hold

'freely, quietly, and peacably, according as it is entirely fenced about and moated about'.

Hawkes (1936, 64)

More mundane uses - as fishpond, firebreak,

stock-pound or reservoir - no doubt also came into play, if only as secondary factors. It may be noted, however, that very few parts of the county require strenuous effort to attract water: indeed the combination of impermeable soils, sluggish watercourses, and ubiquitous springs, tends rather to create problems of water-logging. Thus, in many cases, the moat would have served a valuable purpose in draining the platform area and its surrounds.

Again in common with other parts of the country, moat building was clearly an expression of wealth and social prestige. Harrop (1983), for example, has charted the dramatic rise to wealth and power of the moat-building Legh family. There seems little doubt that the Leghs, who built Broadoak Farm, were a fairly typical example of the emergent landowning class in 14th century Cheshire.

Dating

There is no evidence that any moated site in Greater Manchester was constructed before the late 13th century. Examples of their more military ancestors exist in the possible ringwork of Buckton Castle (VCH 1908, vol 2, 516-8), and the late 12th century motte-and-bailey castles at Dunham, Ringway, Stockport, Manchester and Rochdale (Morris 1983, 16-17), but these are in no way related in status, function or distribution to the developed moat-building tradition.

4.3 **Buckton Castle** Mossley

4.4 **Dunham Massey Hall**

The earliest reference to a moat occurs in the grant of Peel Hall, Ince, mentioned above. The deed is dated 24th August 1300, though survives only in a late 16th century transcription. Mention has been made, too, of the clearance of woodland and construction of the moated hall at Broadoak Farm by John de Legh c1354. A release of land dated 1350 mentions 'the ditch at Le Legh house' (Dodgson 1970, 299), possibly referring to the moat, and the Cheshire Forest Proceedings of 1384 refer to 'a certain manor house inclosed with great ditches and water, built by John de Legh' (ibid.). The archaeological evidence from excavations at Broadoak is consistent with a 14th century date for its occupation, while a demise of 1465, referring to 'the site of the manor of Torkyngton, surrounded by water' (ibid.) suggests that the site had been abandoned by that date. At Buttery House Farm (Wilson 1980,1983), the pottery sequence implied an earliest occupation date of the 12th or 13th century, although the relative scarcity of pottery on the site made the exact chronology uncertain. Excavations at Radcliffe Tower (Tyson 1980) suggested the existence of a moat prior to the granting of a Licence to Crenellate in 1403.

4.5 **Arley Hall** Blackrod

One of the problems in dating moat construction is the fact that it rarely merits comment in contemporary documents. The existence of a moat at a particular date can often therefore only be inferred from contemporary references to a site which is known through other sources to be moated. Thus references to the 'capital messuage' at Denton in 1325-6, to the 'halls' at Worsley in 1307 and Ordsall in 1380, to the 'messuages' at Gidlow in 1354 and Arley in 1393, and to 'the Peel' at Little Hulton **31**, in 1395 (VCH 1911, vol 4; VCH 1911, vol 5) may be taken to imply, though not prove, the existence of the moats at these sites during the 14th century. A series of licences for domestic oratories, granted by the Bishop of Lichfield during the 14th century, may be viewed in the same way; such licences were granted to Barton and Wardley in 1361, Clayton in 1365, Old Bryn in 1379, and Barlow in 1393 (VCH 1911, vol 4).

Thus the rather slender archaeological and documentary evidence from Greater Manchester suggests a broad date range of late 13th - late 14th century for moat construction in the area, and this agrees with the evidence from

neighbouring parts of Lancashire (Taylor 1975) and Cheshire (Harrop 1977, 1983; Wilson 1982). Moat building therefore seems to reach a peak somewhat later in the area than in most parts of the country, where Le Patourel and Roberts (1978) have dated the 'expansion' phase to c1200-1325. It may be noted too that Le Patourel (1982) has identified national peaks of 1330-50 and 1370-1400 in the granting of Licences to Crenellate: the two examples in Greater Manchester (Radcliffe 1403 and Bury 1465) are again somewhat later. The reasons for this backwardness are discussed more fully below.

During the 15th century, the process of wholesale reconstruction began to take place. In some cases (such as Denton Hall) this involved backfilling the moat and expanding across it, while in many others - Wardley, Ordsall and Clayton Halls, for example - the moat was retained and expansion took place within the confines of the platform. The majority of such 'secondary' buildings date from the period mid 15th - late 16th century (Pevsner 1969). Many of the moats which escaped backfilling at this period remained open until the late 19th or 20th century. Others, such as Wigan Hall **10** were less durable: a glebe terrier of 1619 refers to 'the mote ditch' (Bridgeman 1889, 244), and yet by the beginning of the 19th century all trace of it had disappeared.

4.6 **Old Bryn** Ashton in Makerfield

An alternative to reconstruction **in situ** was abandonment of the site, in favour of a new one nearby. Such 'migration' occurred for example, at Haigh Hall **24**, Broadoak Farm, Little Hulton and at Winstanley **6** - where the abandoned moat became a garden feature in the grounds of its 16th century successor. It occured also at Bryn, where the moated site of Old Bryn was deserted, perhaps as early as the 14th century, and a new hall built a kilometre away. In this case however, the new site, Bryn Hall, was also moated (Baines 1836,639). Finally, on the subject of dating, mention might also be made of the triangular moat at Heyes Lane, Timperley (SJ 788899), which is absent from the O.S. First Edition 6" map and is regarded by local tradition as a late 19th century brick croft.

Status

The pattern of medieval settlement in the Manchester region must be viewed within the wider economic and tenurial context of South Lancashire. Before the Conquest, South Lancashire was a border zone of 'debatable land' between the kingdoms of Mercia and Northumbria. Its peripheral status was reflected in the Domesday survey of 1086, which dealt somewhat dismissively with the land 'Between the Ribble and the Mersey' as an adjunct of Cheshire: indeed it is not until 1199 that the county of Lancashire is first recorded (Ekwall 1922). Its backwardness stemmed largely from the inhospitable nature of the landscape. At the time of the Domesday survey, much of the area was 'waste': predominately woodland and scrub in the south-west, moorland in the north-east, and mossland in the east and north-west (Walker 1939). Not only did the mosslands in particular inhibit settlement, but they also served to isolate the area geographically from its neighbours to the south, as did the Pennines to the east.

As discussed in Chapter 2 it seems that South Lancashire remained a political and economic backwater for much of the medieval period. It is equally clear that a distinction may be drawn between the relative wealth of southwest and southeast Lancashire in the medieval period: the southwest was the only area of the county to be assessed at over £5 per square mile in the 1334 Lay Subsidy (Glasscock 1973; Morris 1983). The reasons for the relative wealth of southwest Lancashire are largely environmental. The southwest has better soils, higher average temperatures and lower rainfall than the southeast. It is also more sheltered from southwesterly winds (Walker 1939). It has, therefore, a greater potential for arable cultivation than other areas of South Lancashire, and is still today, (with the exception of recently reclaimed mosslands) the region's main centre of crop production. Other resources may have been of value: the 1376 Sheriff's account of the manor of Worsley for example records that

> 'a profit in Worsley for digging and selling sea-coals (is) worth 15s a year' VCH (1911,Vol 4,379n)

Nevertheless, the principal interest in the area lay in its potential for the production of cereals, particularly of oats (Walker 1939,41). It has been estimated that between the late 11th and mid 14th centuries, England's population may have risen by as much as three-fold (Williams 1982,89). This was accompanied by an increased demand for cereal acreage, and the consequent colonisation of marginal lands. In Lancashire of course, this took the form of rapid, if piecemeal, assarting of the woodlands in the southwest of the county, since these were the areas that were both easiest and most profitable to bring into cultivation.

A closer examination of the distribution of moated sites throughout South Lancashire is very revealing. Roberts (1962,1965) has drawn the distinction in the West Midlands between the 'champion' lands of primary Anglo-Saxon settlement, which are largely devoid of moats, and those areas of secondary post-Conquest

colonisation, in which moats are common. This model is also applicable to South Lancashire. Figure 4.5 shows the distribution of named Domesday vills and of moated sites. It can be seen that the two distributions are significantly different: the majority (over 80%) of named Domesday vills lie within the Hundred of West Derby as compared with less than 15% of moated sites. In contrast, 85% of moated sites lie within a broad belt covering the Hundreds of Newton, Warrington, Leyland and the western and southern parts of Salford, which have a combined total of only 10 named Domesday vills.

Thus it seems clear that the pattern observed by Roberts is detectable in South Lancashire. The area of primary occupation is represented by the Hundred of West Derby, which has an established Domesday population due in large part to Scandanavian coastal settlement. The area of secondary colonisation lies behind this coastal strip, and is marked by the broad zone of moated sites in the neighbouring Hundreds. We can observe in this zone the classic combination of moated homesteads and woodland assarting, leading to a characteristic pattern of dispersed, non-nucleated settlements. Much of this area was subject to Forest Law, but the demand for land was such that in 1199 King John granted a licence to the knights, thegns and freeman of the Honour of Lancaster to cultivate their woods: confirming a grant of 1189-94 for which they had paid a common fine of no less than £500 (Hallam 1981, 180). There are numerous local references to this process of colonisation; a grant of land by Adam de Pemberton to Cockersand Abbey c1212-1235, for example, refers to 'the syke between Stephen's assart and the charcoalman's assart' (VCH 1911, vol 4, 79). In North Cheshire the clearance of 60 acres of royal woodland by John de Legh c1354 (Dodgson 1970, 299) shows that the Forest of Macclesfield too was subject to the same process, and at a fairly late date. We may extend Roberts' model by suggesting that the remainder of Salford Hundred was an area of 'tertiary ' settlement - an area which remained an economic and geographical backwater until the rise of the Tudor woollen trade brought it to unexpected prominence.

Tenurial patterns in the area may also be of relevance. Before the Conquest, the land 'Between the Ribble and the Mersey' had been subject to a succession of political and administrative regimes: Northumbrian, Mercian and finally Scandinavian. This led to a hybrid pattern of land tenure which, because of the general isolation of the area, remained largely unaffected by the Conquest. Thus Domesday Book records that the land was held variously by 'Thegns' (in West Derby and Salford Hundreds). 'Drengs ' (Newton and Warrington) and 'Freemen' (Blackburn and Leyland): a variety of terms for what was probably a single class of freeholders, described by Stenton (1943, 495) as 'a landowning population of little wealth but more than peasant status'.

After the Conquest the lands were handed en bloc to a Norman overlord, Roger de Poitou, but

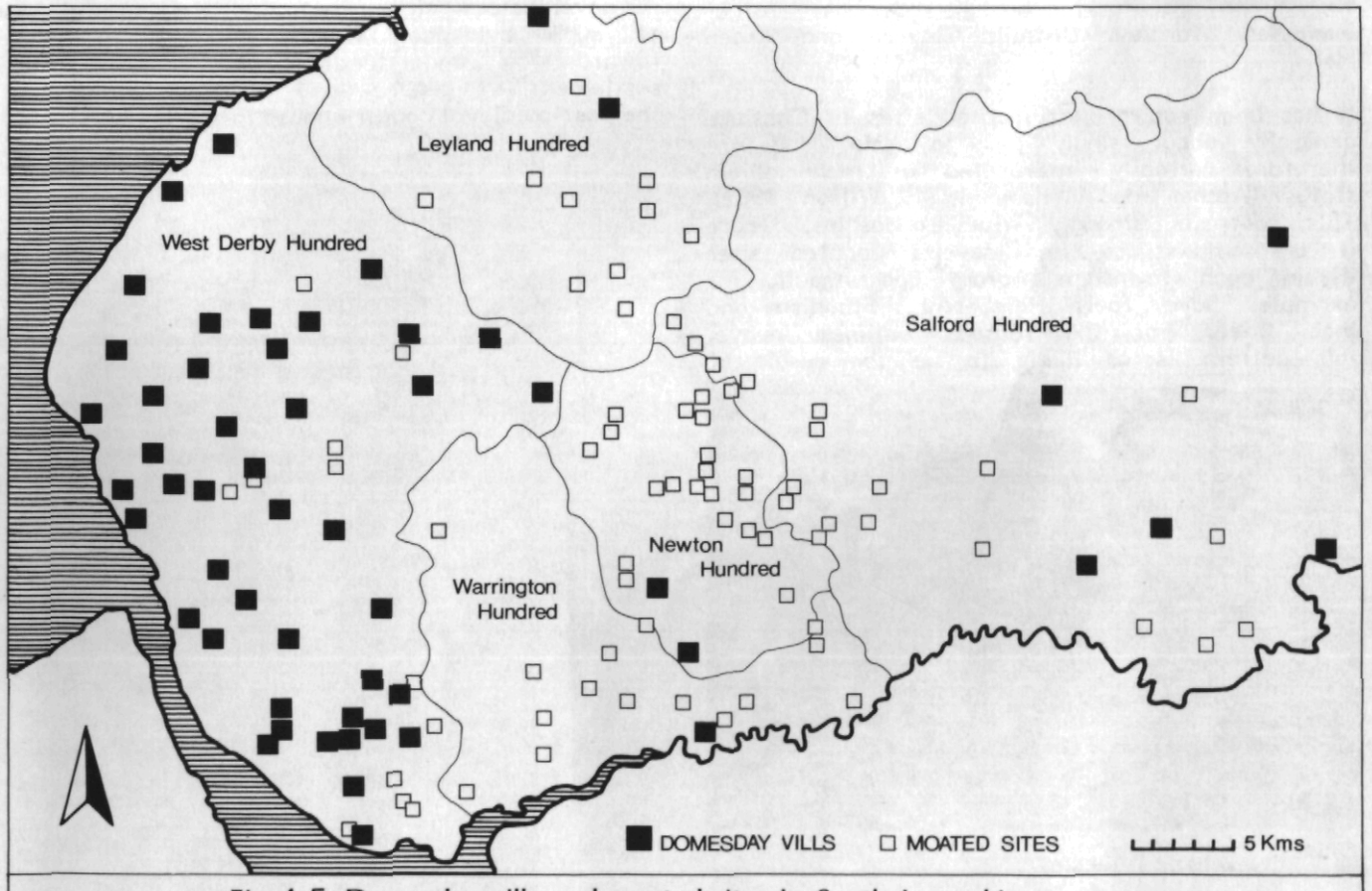

Fig 4.5 Domesday vills and moated sites in South Lancashire

reverted soon afterwards to the crown. Medieval South Lancashire may therefore be described as, in Farrer's words, 'a huge manor of royal demesne, where the ownership by the Sovereign precluded the rise of any great estate or changes of any considerable moment in the status of its inhabitants' (VCH 1906, vol 1, 275). The status of its freeholders was somewhat similar to that of the sokeman of East Anglia, the distinguishing mark of whose tenure was the obligation to render goods and services to some centre of royal demesne (Barrow, 1973). Indeed the term 'socage' became commonly applied to various forms of freehold tenure in southwest and south central Lancashire by the 13th century (see for example VCH 1911, vol 4). Emery (1962) has suggested a connection between socage tenure and moated site distribution in Eastern England. Whilst it would be unwise to draw exact parallels, it does seem likely that the tenurial structure in South Lancashire would likewise have encouraged the growth of a freeholding moat-building population, as well as leading to the inevitable fragmentation of land holdings.

There is evidence too that the custom of partible inheritance was fairly widespread amongst tenants-at-will in medieval Lancashire (Hallam 1981). This system, whereby the heirs to an estate inherited in equal portions, frequently developed in 'open' societies with socage tenure and an absence of feudal ties, and further contributed to the fragmentation of land holdings. This tendency could be counteracted by a system of subdividing the manor house itself into a series of independent units, and indeed Smith (1970) has argued that such a Unit System developed in Lancashire by the 16th century, citing, amongst other examples, Wardley, Ordsall, Clayton and Arden Halls.

It has been shown that moated sites in Cheshire generally occur singly per township, and are therefore normally interpreted as manorial in status (Archer and Wilson 1974; Wilson 1982). This contrasts strongly with Lancashire, where it is common to find several moated sites within each township: Abram and Aspull, for example, have four, Pemberton, Standish and Ince three. For the reasons outlined above, this pattern is as likely to be the result of

4.7 **New Hall** Tyldesley

the generally fragmented tenurial structure in Lancashire as of subinfeudation: indeed it is doubtful whether many land holdings in the area qualified as 'manorial', in the feudal sense, even though the term became widely applied to estates of all sizes by the later medieval period.

Nevertheless it is possible to identify in some areas a form of manorial structure. The township of Westleigh (VCH 1907, vol 3) is an example: here the de Westleigh family were lords of the manor as well as, during the 12th century, hereditary rectors of the parish church (a situation repeated in nearby Wigan). Their moated manor house, Parsonage Farm **32** occupied the classic position close to the parish church and village centre. During the 13th century, however, the de Westleigh's forfeited the rectorship, divided the manor and established a new manor house at Westleigh Old Hall **33**, leaving Parsonage Farm to the new rectors. By the end of the 13th century, this process of subdivision into half-and quarter-manors, sold and leased at will, is seen not only in Westleigh but in the neighbouring townships of Pennington, Bedford, Atherton, Tyldesley and Astley.

Moated sites in the Manchester region fall therefore, as Taylor (1975) has suggested, into two main categories: the capital messuages of wealthy freemen or franklins, holding in socage, or more rarely the manor houses of the lesser gentry and cadet branches. In both cases they are closely associated with the process of secondary settlement, or colonisation of the woodland and waste. Whilst it would clearly be unwise to rely exclusively upon the evidence of a single class of archaeological monument, it is nevertheless clear that, by the careful use of such evidence, it is possible to move towards an understanding of medieval rural settlement in general and of the ancestry of the post-medieval country house in particular.