Sefton Old Hall, Merseyside, Excavations 1956-61

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Introduction

The moated site of Sefton Old Hall, Merseyside (SD 35660115) has aroused considerable interest during this century. Since the First World War there have been various attempts to investigate the site through excavation but none of the results has been published and over the years the records and finds that resulted have been dispersed. This report is of a programme of work undertaken as part of the Archaeological Survey of Merseyside with the intention of assembling and, where possible, interpreting the range of evidence that could be located.

The most significant excavations that have been examined are those of 1956-61 carried out firstly under the direction of Mr Frank Tyrer and then continued by the Merchant Taylors' School Archaeological Society under the supervision initially of Mr J F Elton and latterly Mr R H Gambles. During that five year period a series of trenches was examined, site plans were drawn, and a detailed note kept of the finds. Copies of those notes and plans were deposited by Mr Gambles at the then Ministry of Public Buildings and Works, at Lord Sefton's Estate Office, and at the Lancashire Record Office. Few of the artefacts, however, or descriptions of them and their provenances, have survived. It appears that most of the finds were thrown out as builders' rubbish during alterations at the school. Of the finds that have been recovered, some were apparently given as souvenirs to boys of the school, and there is some suspicion that a proportion of these may have come from other sites. As it was found impossible to relate these surviving finds to their contexts in the excavations little account has been taken of the significance of artefactual evidence. A short list of small finds is, however, included, and it is hoped that a more thorough appraisal of these and other artefacts from the site may be possible at a later date.

When this report is read, it should be appreciated that the records consulted were produced by a number of people who had not necessarily the benefit of recent guidelines for recording excavations and that, after such a long period, the supplementary detail that remained in their minds was often somewhat dulled. Inconsistencies that have become apparent in this analysis can thus only be reported. Site measurements are for the same reason reported in their original imperial units. Dates quoted are those deduced by the excavators, unless otherwise stated. In general, they should be regarded as guiding opinions.

Other moated sites in south Lancashire that might be considered in conjunction with this report are those at Scarisbrick (Steane 1960, 147-153), New Park, Lathom (Steane and Kelsall 1962, 73-98) and Yew Tree House, Halewood, Merseyside (Warhurst 1977, 5-10). Another moated site exists at Edge Farm in the township of Sefton but no survey or documentary research has yet been carried out into it and its possible relationship with Sefton Old Hall.

Topography

Sefton Old Hall lies approximately 470 feet due south of St Helen's Church, Sefton, and a little above the 25 foot contour (figure 1). The geology of the locality is keuper sandstone overlain by a thick boulder clay, with soil of mixed sand and clay of the Astley Hall series. The township of Sefton is low lying and, until the advent of modern drainage schemes, the whole area was subject to flooding from the river Alt. The Alt drains a wide, shallow valley to the north of the site, and the former water mill adjacent to Sefton Church was fed by a mill stream (now filled in) branching from the river. It seems likely that fishponds and the moat associated with Sefton Old Hall were supplied through an extension of the system of mill streams.

History of the site

The manor of Sefton is recorded in the Domesday Book as being held by five thanes. It contained one hide and the value was 16 shillings. Around 1100, Roger of Poitou granted the manor to the family of William de Mollines and in 1912 it was recorded as the chief place of a fee consisting in total of ten and a half ploughlands, six of which lay in Sefton, by the service of half a knight (VCH, 67).

Throughout its history, the manor remained in the hands of the Molyneux family, though it was not always the chief residence. There is no clear evidence of the existence of an early building on the site but 19th century historians considered that a house stood there in 1372 (Mannix 1854, 654; Baines 1893, 229; Caroe & Gordon 1893, 50). The date has been repeated constantly but has not yet been substantiated by contemporary documents.

In 1535 Camden noted that Croxteth was the principal residence of the Molyneux family: 'Mr Molyneux, a knight of great lands, two miles from Prescot, dwelleth at a place called Croxtath'. This
would seem to be confirmed by Lord Burghley's Map of 1590 where Sefton Church is shown surrounded by a paling, with a small building adjacent ascribed to Ric. Molyneux de Sefton. The same map shows that Ric. Molyneux also resided at Croxteth; a more substantial building altogether, if the draughtsmanship is to be taken literally. Gillow (1907, 201) records that, throughout the days of religious persecution, Mass was regularly said in the private chapels at Croxteth and Sefton, as well as at other mansions belonging to the family. Caree and Gordon (1893, 51) state that the chapel was in use until 1780 (VCH, 74, states 1792) when it was replaced by Netherton Roman Catholic Chapel. They also recorded (51) a comment by an elderly woman who claimed that above the chapel were two rooms used for living and sleeping by the cowman's family, but that it was in a dilapidated state at this time (about 1813). It is uncertain, however, whether the chapel did stand inside the moat (Chapel Garden was the name of a field a little to the south west of the site; its position is noted both on the Molyneux Estate Map of 1769 and on the Tithe Map of 1845).

At the inquisition at the death of Sir Richard Molyneux, 1568/69, it was stated that five unmarried daughters were living at Croxteth (VCH 70, n9). Ashmore (1958, 59-105) notes that, on his death in 1623, Sir Richard Molyneux of Sefton's possessions were valued at £3,800. His will, drawn up in 1618, refers to his house at Sefton, but the inventory of 1623 does not specify what proportion of his possessions related to Sefton itself. One interesting item refers to the value of timber for building. Richard, Viscount Molyneux of Mossborough, died at Croxteth on 8 May 1636 possessed of the manors of Sefton, Netherton and Lunt, in addition to many other manors and lands (VCH 70). It is clear that further examination of wills and inventories is necessary.

Leases relating to Sefton were apparently lost in the 17th century (Royalist Composition Papers 1898, 149, fol 781). An affidavit sworn about 1650/51 states that, in the time of the wars, the houses of Lord Molyneux of Croxteth and Sephton were plundered 'and the closets where the evidences lay broken open and some scattered about the houses, some cancelled and torn, other some carried away'. The witnesses had searched for the counterparts of the leases, but had not found them. It is not known whether any destruction of the houses had occurred as a result of this plundering; the Hearth Tax returns of 1666 show that Sefton Hall had 33 hearths, suggesting that little damage had been sustained.

At the Lancashire Record Office there is a petition (OSP 3/10) which, though not directly referring to Sefton Hall, throws some light on the problems encountered through living in such a low lying area close to the river. In 1648 the rector, Joseph Tomson, petitioned his brother, who was apparently clerk at Quarter Sessions, regarding action to be taken to prevent the continual flooding of the river Alt. Flooding had caused the inhabitants of the township to abandon their land, having neither meadow nor pasture for their cattle. It seems possible that Sefton Hall, being closely associated with river and mill stream and its own moat, would also have suffered from flooding at this time, especially if maintenance was in the hands of tenants and not under the direct control of the lord of the manor.

An indenture of 26 October 1694 records the leasing of Sefton Hall and Tarbock Hall to Sir George and Hugh Strode for 500 years at a peppercorn rent (LRO DDM 17/166), but by the middle of the 18th century the leasing of the Hall and demesne seems to have been once more in the hands of the Molyneux family (see Appendix 2).

The diaries of Nicholas Blundell (Tyser 1968, 1970 & 1972) provide useful information regarding the site. Nicholas never referred to the Molyneux family as resident at Sefton. '2 November, 1702: I went to Croxtath with Pat, Gelibrond. We met Lord and Mr. Molineux going a seting. We suped there'. And again on 28 July 1703: 'I went to Croxtath to wate of Lord Molineux . . . but he was not come home'. On his marriage in 1705 Mr Richard Molyneux went to live at Woolton and appears never to have lived at Sefton. The Molyneux family paid frequent visits to Crosby Hall at this time but Nicholas Blundell never visited them at Sefton, only at Croxteth.

However, Nicholas Blundell did pay a number of visits to Sefton, '30 January, 1707: My wife, Mrs. Mills and I went to see the seller at Sefton', and on '6 May, 1724: They (Thomas Brownbill and Mr Toping) went with me to Sephton; I showed them the seller at the Hall and the Church'.

Mr Blundell also made some purchases of building material from Sefton. '15 May, 1719: I met Mr. Shepperd at the Hall of Sefton and bought some old Wainscotting of him, when we had measured it we went to Thomas Tickleys and took a Glass of Aile'. And on '22 May, 1710: Pat Gelibrond went with me to the Hall of Sefton; I helped to lode the wainscotting as I have bought there'. (A footnote to this entry notes Nicholas' household accounts 'Old wainscot and old glass windus . . . £4.0s.0d.') On 9 June, 1719: 'I fetched home from the Hall of Sefton the old glass as I had brought of Mr. Shepperd'. From the foregoing, it would seem that some demolition was taking place on the site at this time and that Mr Shepperd was entitled to negotiate the deal and accept payment. His relationship with the Molyneux family is not clear, but members of the Shepperd family were leasing land and buildings on the site of the Old Hall by the middle of the 18th century (see Appendix 2). It is not certain which buildings were being demolished at this time, but Nicholas Blundell's visit to the 'seller' again in 1724 would suggest that it had escaped destruction.

An estate map of 1769 (figure 2) shows buildings standing on a rectangular platform surrounded by a moat. One complex lies in the north angle, with a separate building to the south east, on the edge of the moat bank. The platform is divided across the centre, two 'courts' being formed on the west and south, separated by an access road which crosses the moat. Outside the moat a small square building is shown at the southern corner and a larger, rectangular building lies to the south of that. It is possible
Figure 1: The Site of Sefton Hall

- Preston
- Liverpool
- Manchester
- Sefton Town
- Windles Green
- Edge Farm
- Buckley Hill

Lunt

River All

1/2 mile

50'
that these were the two buildings reported as foundations visible in 1893 (Caroe & Gordon 1893, 52) and may have been the remains of farm buildings and the tithe barn erected by Antony Molyneux some time before 1553; these were supposedly demolished with the remaining buildings on the platform at the beginning of the 19th century.

The Tithe Map of 1845 (figure 3) shows open land on the moat platform. This is referred to as 'site of old Hall, offices and garden within moat', and its use is 'pasture (old)'.

At the site of the Old Hall, Caroe & Gordon (1893, 50-51) identified a 14th century mullion and large jamb stone of 16th century style workmanship, identical with those of the old mill on the river (demolished following a fire about 1940). A recollection of the house at the time of demolition, about 1817, gleaned from an 80 year old former inhabitant, was of the remaining portion being of stone, completely covered with ivy. It consisted of one gable approached by a flight of steps, supposed to have been formerly part of the internal staircase. The lower storey was already 'dismantled', with neither doors nor glass remaining. The same report states that the moat was as wide as a canal and surrounded with fine trees and fruit trees, few of which remained in 1893.

Caroe and Gordon (1893, 55) reported that the well at the Old Hall was a natural spring. It rose immediately above, and perpetually overflowed into, the moat. It was large and square, but was covered over to prevent cattle from falling into it. In 1951, the Ordnance Survey inspector found that it consisted of three courses of masonry to a depth of 0.7 m on the western side, but by then the eastern side had disappeared.

Seton Old Hall in the 20th century: a summary of events
(a) Photographs of the site of the Old Hall with an accompanying note loaned to the survey by Mr Tyrer, suggest that an excavation had taken place during World War I by a Mr Gregson and a party of soldiers. A preliminary examination of the literature of the period has revealed nothing of the work.
(b) During the years 1956 to 1961 there was a series of excavations, first under the direction of Mr Frank Tyrer and then by the Merchant Taylors' School Archaeological Society.
(c) In 1961 the site was scheduled as an Ancient Monument under the Ancient Monuments Act. After that date excavation ceased and the School exercised a 'watching brief'.
(d) In 1964 a roadway (BS422) was rerouted through the centre of the site. During removal of the soft filling of the moat for replacement by hardcore, Mr B J N Edwards, Archaeologist of the Lancashire Record Office, Preston, recovered artefacts which have since been stored at Preston. His unpublished notes have been studied but an analysis of the finds has been deferred. Mr Edwards notes that none of the finds could be attributed to a date earlier than the late 16th century, with the exception of four fragments of green-glazed roof tiles which may be medieval.
(e) In 1978 a survey of the site was undertaken by students of the Institute of Extension Studies, University of Liverpool, under the direction of Miss D O'Hanlon and Mrs R MacNeil-Sale (see page 68).

The Excavations: 1956-1961
1. The Moat
In the unpublished report, A Summary of the Excavations at Seton Hall, Lancashire, prepared by Merchant Taylors' School, it is noted that before excavations began in 1956 the only visible remains on the site were three sides of a quadrangular moat, two pontoons of a 'drawbridge', and a well. In the opposite corner of the field, 'Castle Field', the 'manorial fishponds' could be seen. Photographs supplied by Mr Tyrer show that at the time of excavation the moat was wet, and that some masonry was visible in the turf, but it has not been possible to relate this with any certainty to the structures found on the site. The report describes the ditches that surrounded the platform as being an almost complete rectangle, with the exception of the southern corner. This corner appears to have been subjected to collapse and infilling since 1848 when the site was surveyed for the Ordnance Survey in the production of its maps scaled at six inches to the mile. The entrance to the platform is clearly shown on the school's plan as being on the south west side, detectable as a narrowing of the ditch from approximately 30 feet to 7½ feet (figure 4). The moat varies in width from a maximum of 40 feet in the southern corner to approximately 27 feet near the north corner. At the northern corner the ditch extends into an arm about 30 feet in length; it is not clear whether this is part of a former system of feeder-streams, an annexe to the moat ditch, or represents more recent agricultural activity. Two courses of streams were recognised, one entering the ditch at the eastern corner, and a second running northwards from the centre of the north east arm of the ditch. (The choice, by the present writer, of the words 'enter' and 'running northwards' is deliberate and intends to indicate the suggested flow of water through the moat, based on the direction of the course of the river Alt and its associated mill streams. This assumption has not yet been proved by field work, but the position of the 'fish ponds', if that is what they are, suggests a flow of clean water through them prior to entry into the moat ditches before being discharged into the mill stream in the vicinity of the mill.) The report suggests that construction of the moat involved the use of natural pools and ditches, but it is unclear whether this statement is based on archaeological evidence.

The excavation revealed another ditch, calculated from the plan (figure 4) to be parallel to, and a little inside, the north western edge of the platform, and three feet deep at its south west end. The
Figure 2: The Manor of Sefton, 1769 (L. R. O. DDM 14/47)
excavator estimated that it had been roughly 25 feet wide. It joined the north eastern arm of the moat close to two 'similar ditches' but these were not excavated or located on the plan. However, it may be reasoned that they were part of the discharge stream and annexe already mentioned.

It should be noted that the original general site plan does not show this ditch, but only the excavation trenches and sections in which it was located. A separate plan was made of the ditch, and its contours and the foundations of buildings located over it, but this did not mark the excavation trenches. The composite plan produced for this report (figure 4) is an attempt to combine these inter-relating pieces of information. The evidence it represents is sometimes in conflict, and where this occurs a discussion has been incorporated in the text.

Although the site plan shows a series of excavation trenches within the subsidiary ditch and location of sections across it (figure 5, sections A and B) there is no record of complete excavation down to the natural surface. The banks were excavated but only the western one received detailed examination. It is shown in Section B to be steep sided, cut into the 'natural sand and clay' and filled with 'dark, black topsoil' suggested to have come from the surrounding field. Coarse pottery, dated to the 14th and 15th centuries, was noted to have come from the bank and two adjacent trenches. The ditch fill was seen to merge, without obvious change, into a 'buried turf layer' which was spread unevenly over the whole site. The turf layer was suggested by the excavator to be of 14th century date. Section B also shows a layer of slate (sic) debris over the turf spread, falling into the residual depression and, over that, a layer of sand and clay, 3 feet deep, which covered the site. The sand and clay layer was attributed a 16th century date elsewhere on the site by virtue of the pottery found within it.

The moat was dug by the excavator to have been redugred in the 14th century and its sides built up, sometimes behind a retaining wall of sandstone (figure 5, section D). It must be noted that the section as drawn would have to be a mirror image of that examined in order to be observed in the side of the trench indicated on the general site plan. This anomaly can only be explained by assuming it to be a draughtsman's error or, more probably, that it had appeared in a different section ie the adjoining baulk.

Revetments were noted to have been constructed around most of the moat bank, and in some unspecified places the bank was strengthened with sandstone slates (sic), broken pottery, bones and clay, resulting in a steepening of the moat bank and the consequent enlargement of the platform. The pottery from the bank was described as lead and salt glazed wares, of fairly good quality, with numerous fragments of Rhenish ware and slipware. The discrepancy between a suggested 14th century date for redugredging and building up of the bank and the 17th century date of the pottery is obvious.

2. The Platform

The site plan shows the platform to be approximately 190 feet by 180 feet, and the excavation report notes that it was overlain by a 'turf level spread unevenly over the whole of the site'. The turf level was attributed to the 14th century by reason of decorated earthenware and coarse pottery found in trenches approximately 75 feet and 120 feet south east of the silted up subsidiary ditch described above. The buried turf layer noted to have been 'washed away' at some unspecified parts of the site.

Above the 14th century turf layer was another of sand and clay to a depth of 3 feet, considered to have 'blown in' during the 16th century. The date was assumed from the pottery the layer contained.

Access to the platform was gained from the south west, across a narrowing of the moat, the resulting entrance being approximately 14 feet wide. An area on the north west side of the entrance was uncovered and foundations, identified as those of a 'drawbridge' were noted. No drawings were made and the precise location of the structures within the excavated trenches is unknown. The foundations are described as two pontoons constructed of yellow sandstone blocks, 12 inches by 30 inches, well dressed and laid without mortar. Reference is made to a similar, though smaller, pontoon lying to the east of the 'inner pontoon', in the moat itself, and joined to the larger structure by a retaining wall of the same materials. The wall was built on sandstone slates (sic) consisting, at the time of excavation, of a single course. The purpose of the wall was not recognised, but it was conjectured that it might form part of the wall revetment of the moat bank.

A cobbled road with cambered surface is noted to have run north east from the entrance. This was laid on the 16th century sand and clay layer and ran into the centre of the platform where it overlay the remains of Building 2. The width of the road and depth of its foundations, if any, are not recorded, and its portrayal on figure 4 is conjectural.

3. Building 1 (figure 6)

Before discussing the excavator's notes on this part of the site, the point made in discussion of the subsidiary ditch of the moat needs some expansion. Site records show the location within the platform of the excavation trenches and sections on one plan, and the excavated foundations and contours on another. Anomalies are revealed when the two plans, redrawn to a common scale, are superimposed. There are insufficient common points of reference to enable a precise superimposition to be made and, in any arrangement, a number of anomalies remain to make its absolute acceptability doubtful. The arrangement shown in figure 4 is considered by the present writer to be the best fit, but the resulting extension of the building into the moat, the position of the drawn sections, and the evidence within the trenches for the foundations that are described, are all subject to a degree of doubt.
Figure 3: The Map of Sefton, 1845 (L R O DRL 1/72)
The complex of foundations, here described as Building 1, was recognised during the excavation to have resulted from three phases of building.

Phase 1 consisted of walls of rough sandstone blocks (size not recorded) bonded with clay, and with foundations reaching a depth of 4 feet (figure 5, Section A), built along the edge of the former ditch. Two of the walls, A and B, were incorporated into a later structure (Phase 2) and the others were recognised by their construction trenches, filled with rubble dated to the 16th century. It seems that these walls enclosed an area of approximately 14 feet by 28 feet. A lean to annexe of more crude construction was identified, attached to the south west corner of the original building, and interpreted as a storeroom (the reason for this assumption is not recorded). Internal measurements of the annexe are approximately 10 feet by 10 feet 6 inches. No doorways or blocked up openings are marked on the plan, and indeed its portrayal there seems to be based on conjecture.

It was considered that Phase 1 of the building was earlier than the 14th century turf layer. Study of the incomplete section A reveals nothing to confirm or refute this suggestion as the lower limits of the turf layer are not recorded, and there is no evidence of construction trenches adjacent to the walls.

On the north side of the building was an area of crushed sandstone overlain by the sand and clay layer found all over the platform. Its extent is not recorded, and no comment is made regarding its relationship with the structure.

Phase 2 of the building is interpreted as an attempt at rebuilding the original structure after collapse of the north west (sic) corner into the former ditch, to a depth of nearly 2 feet. The original north wall was extended eastwards by 5 feet and a second wall, cutting the 14th century turf layer, was built outside and above the earlier east wall (figure 5, Section A). The width of the walls was increased to 5 feet. This phase was recognised by the use of more substantial sandstone blocks, though these were also bonded with clay. An expansion of the building at its southern end was also attributed to this phase. Foundations were reported to be laid 6 feet below the surface, though it is unclear whether this refers to a present day or 14th century datum. Remains of a semi circular buttress strengthening each corner of the south wall are described in the report, though only one is suggested on the plan. The south wall was extended westwards towards the ditch. On the plan this extended wall is shown to be considerably less than the 5 feet width claimed for the rest of the building. The extension is noted to be on a hard clay footing with only one course of sandstone blocks beneath the 'then turf line'. A little to the north of the eastern buttress, a wall, 3 feet wide, ran off in a southerly direction towards the centre of the platform. Between its run off point and the buttress, the building wall had been breached for the construction of a 19th century drain, which also crossed the west wall of the building.

It was considered by the excavator that these repairs and extensions had taken place in the 14th century. Examination of section A suggests that wall B had cut into the 14th century turf layer or ditch infill and would apparently represent a rebuilding some time after the 14th century. Further examination of section A adds little to an understanding as it merely shows a succession of layers which cannot from the available evidence be related to wall A of Phase 1. However, it can be noted that all layers and features, with the exception of wall B, were sealed first by rubble and then by modern turf.

Problems regarding subsidence apparently continued to necessitate further repairs. Where the earlier building and its square annexe adjoined a new brick wall replaced the last surviving wall of the earlier building, possibly to infill a gap which developed due to collapse of the annexe. The statement was made that the main entrance was blocked up, but the location of the entrance is not recorded.

Phase 3 comprised the construction of a series of walls to the north east of the Phase 1 and 2 buildings. A wall was constructed parallel with the moat ditch. Its foundations were of brick rubble to a depth of over 2 feet, and the wall itself was of stone. Where the wall crossed the silted up ditch it was more solidly built of brick and mortar to a depth of 6 feet. A gap is shown on the plan between the stone wall and brick wall, but with no explanation. From the brick wall another stone wall adjoined running south west to join the Phase 2 extension of the earlier building. The plan indicates a most unhappy combination of walls at this point, but no explanation was suggested regarding replacement of one wall by another, and interpretation has not been possible on the evidence to hand.

In addition brick walls were constructed on poorly made rubble foundations, which did not pierce the 'medieval' turf layer, and the construction of these walls completed the enclosure of two 'rooms'. No mention is made regarding the position of door openings. It was considered that these walls would not have supported an upper storey, and it seems that they must have been merely partitions within a load bearing structure. Remains of neither stairwell nor chimney were found, and no mention is made of flooring.

At the north eastern end of this group another 'room' was located. This consisted of stone walls enclosing an area approximately 10 feet 3 inches by 14 feet, with a brick and stone floor, 4 feet below ground level (modern ground level). The south western of these walls was 13 feet from the edge of the moat. A brick support adjoined the internal side of this wall, and was assumed to have provided support for a ladder to give access to the 'cellar'. Considerable wear was noted on the stones immediately to the east of the column. At a later period it was reasoned that repairs had been necessary when the structure started to slip into the moat. A cobbled area was located outside the south east wall of Phase 3. Its extent is not recorded, but photographs of the excavation suggest that at the time of excavation the cobbled area was patchy and extended no more than two or three feet eastwards from the wall.
Figure 4: Excavations of Sefton Old Hall, 1956-1961
Foundations of rubble containing broken brick and two smashed pots were found running between the 'cellar' and main building. It was thought that they may have supported a timber structure connecting the two buildings.

At the north east end of the cobbled area, east of the cellar, a large midden was discovered. Its position and size as shown on the plan are conjectured (figure 4). The contents were mainly of bone and broken brick, with numerous fragments of 17th century pottery and a yellow slipware dish.

4. Building 2 (figure 7)

Building 2, located at the centre of the platform, was rectangular in plan the overall dimensions of approximately 12 feet 9 inches by 10 feet enclosing an internal area approximately 6 feet by 7 feet 6 inches.

The excavated remains consisted of large blocks of roughly faced keuper sandstone, found at a depth of about 3 feet below the present surface. (No sections or notes have survived regarding the deposits in which the foundations were laid.) Three walls remained but the fourth had been almost completely robbed out and 'replaced by the enveloping clay', and the floor had been destroyed. It is recorded that there was an area of crushed sandstone adjacent to the building, similar in nature to the crushed sandstone found on the north side of Building 1, Phase 1.

Destruction had apparently taken place by the 14th century as fragments of an iron vessel, dated by the British Museum, were found in the turf level immediately above the remains of the building. It is recorded that the cobbled road which ran across the platform from the entrance terminated over Building 2.

The plan of the building also recorded a series of dotted lines which marked the line of a wall considered to have been a continuation of the eastward projecting wall of Building 1, Phase 2, thus forming a masonry barrier effectively dividing the platform in half. However, the evidence for the existence of this wall was not recorded. The detailed plan of the building records the location of a 19th century drain, with the caption 'wall removed for drain trench'. However, it is far from clear whether the wall was removed in order to accommodate the drain, or whether the drain was following part of the line of a wall previously robbed out.

5. Building 3 (figure 8)

Building 3 is located in the eastern corner of the platform. It was apparently rectangular in construction, with overall dimensions of 15 feet 9 inches by 16 feet 6 inches. An internal partition crossed the centre on its longest axis. A second partition wall of stone was assumed to have been added to strengthen the building. It was reasoned that the north east part of the building had collapsed. A buttress (the plan suggests of stone) was added on the south east side. Section C (figure 5) suggests that the building was erected at a time later than the 14th century turf layer and that the foundations were dug into the 16th century sand and clay layer. A halfpenny of George II was found beneath the rubble of the collapsed building, implying that collapse could have taken place no earlier than 1727/1728. No comment is made regarding the use of the building except to call it an 'outhouse'.

6. The Well (figure 8)

The well lies approximately 20 feet south west of building 3. It is slightly elliptical in shape, apparently due to repairs in the 15th or 16th century (the excavator records the earlier date on the plan and the later in his text). The original construction was of small crude blocks of stone, and repairs were recognised by the large, crudely fitting slabs, bricks and mortar. A cobbled surface around the perimeter was deduced to have been laid at the time of the repairs, but this opinion is not substantiated. The sand and clay inundations had apparently caused problems of siting of the well as a horseshoe shaped bank of clay had been erected around it, leaving the east side open, supposedly as an overflow. A second overflow was recognised and led into the moat to the south of the well, but the excavator considered that this had been ignored when the repairs were carried out. (The brick wall shown in figure 8, section A-B, to the south of the well is not recorded in the excavation notes, and its relationship to the well is not known.)

7. Drain (figure 4)

The line of the drain has been drawn, by the present writer, on the main site plan in an approximate position deduced from the summary report, which notes, "Its outlet is thirty feet to the east of the cellar and it goes twenty-three feet into the centre before turning east ten feet and following from there a course to a low spot near the well". The excavator considered that it had been constructed to take off surface water which was running into the well. The outlet was built on large stone slabs, similar to those in the floor of Building 1, Phase 3, but of different dimensions. The drain slabs were 3 feet by 1 foot 6 inches. The base slabs were well dressed, but the stones above (capping stones) were hardly shaped and varied in size and shape. The supporting walls were of poor quality stones and bricks with no mortar. Stone robbing had taken place at this point, and the outlet was filled in with a large stone 'evidently from the roof of the house or a gatepost'. Shards of Liverpool delft ware tiles, fragments of glass and lead, and early 19th century kitchen wares were recovered in the vicinity of the outlet. The rest of the drain was constructed of sand, and brick and plaster. Along the 10 feet length there were signs of
Figure 5: Sections at Sefton Old Hall

For location of Sections A & B see figure 6, for Sections C & D see figure 8
robbing 'the surface being considerably disturbed'. No dimensions were given of the drain and its channel.

8. Post holes (figure 4)

Three post holes were recorded in the excavation notes, but their location was not marked on the site plan. 'To the east of the outlet of the drain, six feet from the edge of the moat three post holes have been uncovered. These are about six feet apart and curve slightly as they approach the north east corner of the site, and would appear to have formed part of a palisade'. Two fragments of 12th century pottery, dated a little uncertainly by the British Museum, were recovered from the base of one of the post holes. No dimensions of the post holes were given, and there is no comment regarding timber remains. Their position as shown on figure 4 is conjectural and based on the information quoted above, and the assumption that at least one of them must have been located in one of the excavation trenches. No comment is made in the excavation notes with regard to the deposit in which the post holes were located.

9. Discussion

The nature of the excavations, coupled with the loss of details regarding the finds, has imposed considerable constraints upon the type of analysis and interpretation that can be undertaken. The following discussion is attempted within these constraints.

The date of the original construction of the moat has not been established and comments regarding its redredging in the 14th century are dubious in the absence of material evidence. However, it does seem certain that the ditch below Building 1 was filled in by the 14th century, and that its surface corresponded with the turf surface at that period. The dating of the buried turf layer is based on finds of fragments of a 14th century iron vessel from rubble above the remains of Building 2, together with the presence of decorated earthenware and coarse pottery in the turf layer uncovered east of Building 1. It is not possible to confirm this dating but it is the latch pin for all the other dating on the site. From the finds, it is likely that redredging of the moat took place in the 16th/17th centuries. It is regrettable that a relationship between this redredging and the sand and clay layer of supposed 16th century date has not been established.

At the time of excavation, the three post holes were interpreted as a palisade. The 12th century pottery found at the base of one of the post holes, suggests a tentative date but the implications remain uncertain as there is no comment on the relationship of the post holes to the buried land surface. The lack of dimensions of the post holes makes it impossible to confirm or deny the palisade theory. It is, however, tempting to consider that they belonged to a timber framed building, and that other post holes were either not recognised for what they were or that the system of trenches did not open sufficient surfaces for proper investigation.

Possibly contemporary with the 'palisade' was Building 2, which apparently lay below the buried 14th century surface, and was overlain partly with 'enveloping clay' and by a later cobbled road leading from the platform entrance. The relationship of Building 2 with the 'curtain' wall, which was reported to have run from it to Building 1 (and was found to contain a 19th century drain along part of its length) is by no means certain, but it seems likely that the wall was of more recent date than Building 2.

At the time of excavation, it was considered that Phase 1 of Building 1 represented the oldest structure on the site. Phase 1 of Building 1 was built over the ditch silted up by the 14th century and there were problems of subsidence at its north west corner. It seems possible that it was sited in ignorance of the soft nature of the subsoil or that, at the time of its construction, there was little other space available on the platform. Whatever the reason, it appears to have been constructed after the 14th century.

The relationship of the annexe with Phase 1 of Building 1 cannot be verified from the plan of the building, though it may finally have gone out of use with the blocking of the adjoining wall with brick, probably in the 17th century or later (see below).

The acceptance of a post 14th century date for Phase 1 leads to the problems of dating Phases 2 and 3. The relationship of Phase 1 with Phase 2 is far from clear in the absence of notes regarding the butting or bonding of walls. Dating is, thus, impossible; it being certain only that the layers overlying the remains of wall B (figure 5, section A) consist of a demolition layer and a modern turf layer. It therefore seems likely that wall B was standing until final demolition of the buildings in the early 19th century.

At the time of the excavation it was considered that Phase 3, of stone on brick rubble foundations, was of the 'Tudor period'. However, Clifton-Taylor (1972, 219) and Pevsner (1969, 57) state that brick was little used in Lancashire before the 17th century, and then only in the south west of the county. Indeed, Clifton-Taylor states that despite the success which brick enjoyed, it was still far from being universal in England in the 16th century, it being an expensive commodity requiring certain skills in manufacture. As a result, its adoption at the vernacular level was correspondingly slow. In the light of this, it would seem to be unlikely that stone walls constructed on a brick rubble foundation could be much earlier than the 17th century. Few remaining brick buildings in the vicinity of Sefton Old Hall seem to fall into the Tudor period. The Old Hall at Ince Blundell is dated by Pevsner (1969, 128) to the 16th century, but internal timber details seem to suggest an early 17th century date. Downholland Hall and Formby Hall are thought to be of 16th century date, but insufficient work has been done on early brick buildings in the area to confirm this claim.
In Sefton parish itself there appear to be no brick buildings of a date earlier than the mid 18th century.

Thus, in the absence of more detailed research it seems dangerous to assume that any brick building would have taken place on the site much before the early 17th century. The existence of the field name 'Brick Croft' on the Molyneux estate map of 1769, with the addition of a water filled pit (? due to clay extraction) by 1845, suggests that bricks were being made on demesne land in the 18th century, and that such bricks may well be incorporated into the farm and barn at Sefton Hall Farm south west of Sefton Old Hall and the still existing fabric of Mill House, east of Sefton Church, which bears a date-stone of 1753.

It seems possible that the walls of Building 1 at Sefton Old Hall were constructed some time prior to 1769, but probably no earlier than about 1600. The brick- and stone floored construction built into the north end of the silted up ditch beneath Building 1, may be the 'seller' viewed by Nicholas Blundell in the years between 1707 and 1724 (Tyrer 1968, 1970 and 1972); the very fact that it is singled out for particular visits suggests that it may have been newly constructed and that Nicholas was comparing it with his own 'seller' which was in existence in 1705 (Tyrer 1968, 97).

The contents of the midden found on the north east side of Building 1 do not appear to date from any earlier than the 17th century, and the bricking up of the wall adjoining the annexe and the main building of Phase 1 seems most likely to have taken place at this period.

The excavations did little to pinpoint the use of Building 1. The comment was made that the walls of Phase 3 were too flimsy to support an upper storey, and no remains of chimney or staircase were found. It seems likely that the building represents a small living area (Phase 1 and 2) with additional animal quarters or outhousing, and cellar attached. This would appear to be consistent with the leases of the 18th century (Appendix 2) but does little to explain the remains of the building described in Caroe & Gordon (1893, 50-51) as a gable of stone, approached by a flight of steps, finally demolished in the early 19th century. It does, however, seem clear from the outline of the excavated buildings and those depicted on the 1769 plan (figures 2 & 4) that these represent the same structure.

Building 3 appears to have its foundations in the sand and clay layer ascribed to the 16th century (see below) and, therefore, to be of post 16th century date. The absence of comment regarding building materials makes it difficult to elaborate on this, but it seems certain that it was standing in 1769 (figure 2). The finding of a George II halfpenny beneath the rubble of the collapsed building helps to confirm this view. The excavator ascribed no specific use to the building except for referring to it as an 'outhouse'. It is likely that it is one of the buildings referred to in the leases of the 18th century (see Appendix 2).

The problems of flooding and the petition of 1648 have been quoted in the paragraphs regarding the history of the site. The existence of a layer of sand and clay, mixed and spread all across the site to a depth of 3 feet, and containing 16th and 17th century pottery appears to confirm this view. It is strange that section A does not contain evidence of this spread, especially as it is clearly recognised in section B. The excavator's claim that the sand and clay had been 'blown in' during the sand inundations of the 16th century seems rather unlikely. Flooding of the site, bearing in mind its low lying position, coupled with the fact that the Molyneux family may well have been absentee landlords by this time, seems to be a more likely cause.

The fact that the well is sited over a natural spring may have been the reason for the original choice of site. The excavation confirmed the statement of the Ordnance Survey inspector in 1951 that the eastern side of the well was absent. The use of bricks and mortar in the repairs to the well suggest that such repairs took place after 1600.

No conclusions can be drawn regarding the date of the structure standing at the entrance to the site and considered by the excavator to be a 'drawbridge'. It is not possible to prove its association or otherwise with the cambered, cobbled road of post 16th century date. It appears that the only access to the site was via this 'drawbridge', though any structural remains had disappeared by 1769 (figure 2). It is likely that the cobbled road is represented by the avenue between two enclosures shown on the 1769 plan.

The drain across the site cannot be dated from the evidence presented, but the use of brick suggests a date not earlier than 1600 for the repairs, and the material from the blocked outlet gives a date comparable with the traditional view for final abandonment of the site in the early 19th century. The drain which crossed the site on the north side of Building 2 and cut the walls of Building 1, was recognised as a 19th century in date at the time of excavation. Its direction across the site seems to suggest that it followed a line independent of the line of the 'curtain' wall, but bearing in mind the problems concerning the relationship of buildings within trenches it is impossible to be certain about this.

10. Conclusions
1. The original date of construction of the moat cannot be stated. It was dredged in the 16th/17th century with a corresponding expansion in the size of the platform.
2. The natural surface of the platform was overlain with a layer of turf established by the 14th century. A timber framed building may have been contemporary with the stone building standing in the centre of the platform, demolished by the 14th century.
Figure 7: Plan of Building 2

- 19 C. drain
- Wall removed for drain trench

Building 2

Remains of wall
3. Further building of a structure with stone foundations took place on the site after the 14th century (Building 1, Phases 1 and 2).
4. The site had been covered by sand and clay layers in the 16th century, probably due to flooding.
5. Additional building with brick (Building 1, Phase 3, and Building 3) took place after the 16th century.
6. Repairs to the well were probably contemporary with the construction of 16th century buildings.
7. Some demolition took place in the first quarter of the 18th century (perhaps of buildings which had suffered due to flooding).
8. Buildings 1 and 3 were still standing on the platform in 1769. The access road and two enclosures were still in evidence.
9. All buildings had disappeared from the site by 1845.
10. Drains on the site are probably late 18th or early 19th century in date.
11. The 1964 roadway destroyed the south east part of Building 1, and it is likely that the remains of the excavated postholes were also destroyed by the roadworks. Part of Building 2 may have survived, and Building 3 and the 'drawbridge' were unaffected.
12. An area in the southern part of the platform remains unaffected by either excavations or roadway construction.

Survey of the moat: 1978 (figure 9)
This was carried out by students of the Institute of Extension Studies, the University of Liverpool, under the direction of D O'Hanlon and R MacNeil-Sale.

All that remains of Sefton Old Hall today is the rectangular moat. It is bisected by the B 5422 which runs south west from Maghull to Litherland.

The northern part of the site, which lies adjacent to St Helen's Church, is perhaps the better preserved. The moat is water filled and has what is probably the remains of a leet or channel to the north which, at one time, presumably linked the moat with Sefton Mill. Traces of stone footings on the north east side of the platforms may indicate the remains of the cellar described by Nicholas Blundell (Tyrer 1970, 30). An extension of the north corner of the moat may be of later date than the original moat, and it is suggested that it may have served as a watering place for cattle, or for soaking the wheels of carts.

The southern part of the site, adjacent to Old Hall Farm, seems to show a greater degree of disturbance. A wide marshy break in the moat at the south corner may represent infill at some time after 1845, since the Tithe Map shows that the moat is continuous except for the causeway on the south west arm. The causeway itself still shows some of its stone footings, but is marshy and much disturbed. A channel or leet running due east from the east corner of the moat probably represents yet another link with the river Alt. A well, situated on the south eastern side of the platform is still clearly discernible. The moat is water filled but is shallower than on the north side.

A complex of marshy, overgrown depressions lying approximately 35 metres east of the south site may represent the remains of fish ponds, but these require further investigation.

Despite the mutilation which it has undergone, Sefton Old Hall moat remains as a good example of a moated site, and compares well with other similar sites in Merseyside, such as that at Maghull (SD 36660216). This survey merely indicates the need for a closer study of the site, both from documents and fieldwork.

Appendix 1
The Small Finds: 1956-61

The following summary is based on excavation notes where contexts for the finds are recorded. The notes included the comment that in general the pottery was of poor quality, unwedged clay, with poor, badly applied glazes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Century</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Provenance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1?12</td>
<td>Two sherds of 'exceptional crudity' with flint chip inclusions</td>
<td>base of one of the post holes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>medieval</td>
<td>roof tiles, two of which were restored fragments of kitchen vessels</td>
<td>not known</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>medieval</td>
<td>fragments of iron vessel decorated earthenware and coarse pottery rough pottery wardrobe counter</td>
<td>not known</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>turf layer above the remains of Building 2 trenches in the vicinity of post holes and Building 3</td>
<td>not known</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>turf layer in trenches of Building 1 bank of ditch below Building 1</td>
<td>not known</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 8: Plan of Building 3 and Well. For the location of Section D see text
| 15 | pipkin | not known |
|    | rough pottery | trenches of Building 1 bank of ditch below Building 1 |
| 16-17 | poor quality 'Cistercian ware' | sand and clay layer |
|       | fine candlesticks | sand and clay layer |
|       | jugs | sand and clay layer |
|       | drinking beakers | sand and clay layer |
|       | lead glazed ware | ? moat bank |
|       | salt glazed ware | ? moat bank |
|       | Rhenish ware | ? moat bank |
|       | slipware | ? moat bank |
|       | broken pottery, bones and clay | moat bank |
|       | bones | midden |
|       | broken brick | midden |
| 16-17 | pottery fragments (17th century) | midden |
|       | yellow slipware dish | midden |
| 18 | George II halfpenny | beneath rubble of Building 3 |
| 17-19 | 3 Liverpool delftware tiles | drain outlet |
|       | slipware plate (yellow with light brown pattern) | drain outlet or moat bank |
|       | fragments of glass | drain outlet |
|       | lead | drain outlet |
|       | early 19th century kitchenware | drain outlet |
|       | well glazed pottery, speckled brown glazes | not known |
|       | varying from greenish yellow to dark brown/black (all thick plates and storage vessels) | not known |
| 16-19 | clay pipe fragments, including Liverpool Freemason pipes, and 3 stamped ‘Garibaldi’ | not known |

Appendix 2

18th Century Leases relating to Sefton Old Hall, deposited at the Lancashire Record Office

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recall No.</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DDM 46/139</td>
<td>Lease, 1725, to Robert Shepherd: In Sefton, the site of the House, two yards a croft the Stanfield the Higher and Lower Field etc etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDM 46/165</td>
<td>Lease, 1740, to Robert Shepard, yeoman: Capital messuage called and known by the name of Sefton Hall (except that part now in the possession of John Curdon, gent., and also that other part in the possession of Wm.Culcheth) together with the barn called the New Barn, with the stable and one cow house or shippon on the foilds orchard and bowling green and also all closes and parcel a called Sown Park the two foulding crofts further marl’d hey being part of Sefton demesne.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDM 46/167</td>
<td>Lease, 1741/42, to William Culcheth, chapman: Water grist mill and kiln known as Sefton Mills all that part of the capital messuage called Sefton Hall in the possession of Wm. Culcheth with sufficient stabling for two horses and shipponing for two cows and convenient room for hey for them in some of the outbuildings at Sefton to be set out and allotted by John Chadwick, agent to the said Lord Molyneux and also that Orchard called the Ash Orchard, etc etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDM 46/183</td>
<td>Lease, 1756, to John Shepherd, husbandman: Appartment being part of the capital messuage or mansion house called Sefton Hall where the said John Shepherd now dwells together with the outhousing and buildings thereunto belonging and several closes or closures and parcels or land part of Sefton demesne, ie the orchards garden bowling green and folds the nearer foulding crofts the farther folding croft sown park into two parts, etc etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 9: Survey of the site in 1978 by Students of the Institute of Extension Studies, University of Liverpool
DDM 46/182 Lease, 1756, to James Shepherd, yeoman:

Lease, 1756, to James Shepherd, yeoman: 
Water corn mill and millin killn and windmilln commonly called and known by the name of Sefton milln together with a parcel of land called Ash Orchard and part of the capitall messuage called Sefton Hall usually held and enjoyed with the same millns, etc etc.

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Abbreviations

DDM Molyneux Muniments (deposited deed Molyneux)
LRO Lancashire Record Office
RSLC Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire
THSLC Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire
VCH Victoria History of the County of Lancashire