

Speke Hall Moat

Susan Nicholson

At the time of writing, Spring 1982, the now dry and partly landscaped moat exists on the east, north and west sides of Speke Hall. It is bridged in two places: at the main entrance and at the kitchen courtyard. There is no visible evidence of it, except from the air, on the south side.

This note gathers together all the available documentary and field evidence for the moat in an attempt to discover its history.

In 1314 the brook of Mykelderyord (Great Deer Yard) flowed through the Clough below the house of John and Nichola le Norrays at Speke. It also had a tributary joining it at an unspecified point. It has been suggested that the house mentioned was on or close to the site of the present Speke Hall (Lumby 1939, 24).

The medieval documents do not refer specifically to a ditch or moat at the Hall itself, although watercourses nearby are mentioned (Lumby 1939, 24, 32), but recent evidence shows that one existed at this period. The major restoration work being carried out at Speke Hall afforded the opportunity for an excavation inside the north west corner of the building in 1981-2. The evidence indicates that the medieval hall covered a somewhat smaller area than its post medieval successor. A channel cut in the sand to 3.3m below the present floor level of the billiard room, and almost parallel with the new dry moat on the north front, contained a waterlogged filling with wood and other plant remains, pottery dating from the 13th century to about 1550, including some imported French wares, and an heraldic pendant of 14th century date. Borings made along the line of this channel, but outside the west front of the present building, have indicated waterlogged silts at a depth of 3m and the channel may represent a boundary or moat which was resited in the post medieval period (Higgins 1982). Other details of the excavation are on p 6.

The 1624 inventory of Sir William Norris lists the contents of '...the Chamber next the newe bridge where the gardeners lye' (Saxton 1946, 129). Evidently there was a deep ditch or moat to be crossed and either there had been an old

bridge at that spot, or there was an old one which still existed, crossing the same ditch or moat at another point. The fact that the gardeners used the room may indicate that it was on the east or kitchen side of the Hall, though not necessarily part of that range of buildings.

Sir Thomas Norris's fish-stocking records of 1685-96 (Liverpool RO: 920 NOR 2/537) include the first direct references to the moat: '...into ye moate 46 coupell of Carpe 1693/3 yeare oulds into ye moate 70 coupell of Carpe this yeare bread into the furthest side of ye moate 190 couple of Pearch 1693...' These indicate that the moat existed on at least two sides of the Hall.

The 1700 inventory of Sir Thomas Norris has a reference to '...the Servant's Chamber att the Back Bridge' (Saxton 1945, 125), perhaps the same room occupied by the gardeners in 1624.

Wiswall's accounts of 1710-1719 for Dr Edward Norris (Liverpool RO: Hq 942.721.3 SPE) note work on two bridges: 12 September 1712 '...pailing the Wood Bridge...' (f30) and 7 April 1713 '...paveing on the stone bringe...' (f40); he also refers, on 9 November 1713, to '...Filling rubbish at Bridge end...' (f49) and on 8 March 1716 records '...Setting a Gate att Moat side...' (f83). Possibly the stone bridge was the one crossing the moat to the main entrance on the north side of the Hall, and the wooden bridge may have been by the kitchen courtyard and so possibly the one referred to in the inventories.

Wiswall also has several entries concerning drainage work, especially in 1713, and these may have had some connection with a water supply to the moat: 7 February 1713 '...Helpint to open and lay bare ye lead pipe at Higher Damme head ...' (f36); 13 February 1713 '...helping to fill the (sluice) up when the box was fixed att Higher Dam and Lead pipes laid ...' (f37); 10 March 1713 '...Timber work for Plumber to cast Lead pipes, laying Sole trees & making a Box at the Higher Damne...and making covers for the Brick work on the Green...' (f38) (Sole trees = beams of wood laid on the ground to support upright beams); 15 July 1713 '...Laying soughs (drains) with flagg and Brick on the Green...' (f44). Later that same year, on 2 September, payment was made for two days' work '...at Washhouse Damme...' (f46). There were, then, two dams. The water from the higher (north) dam was controlled at its head (lower end) by a sluice and was channelled through lead pipes. In addition, work was carried out on a covered drain across the kitchen court (f65).

Addison's map of 1781 (fig 1a) (copy in Archaeological Survey of Merseyside, MCM), the first known map of Speke, shows a brook whose source is not clearly marked, forming the boundary between New Park and Great Plumb Field and flowing into the higher dam just beyond the point where an outlet from a pond joins the brook. The lower dam lies a short distance

south of the higher one. A water filled moat is shown on the east and north east sides of the Hall and the bridges are in the same position as the ones seen today. It is possible that Addison indicated only those areas which actually contained water, and that a moat existed on the other sides, but it is not shown there because it was dry. The watercourse through the Clough to the Mersey is marked clearly, and it would seem that an underground drain led to it from the lower dam. There is also a small pond at the top of Clough Croft.

A map of c 1800 (fig 1b) (Liverpool RO: K) seems to accord closely with the 1781 depiction of the dams and watercourses. A view published in the Gentlemans Magazine in April 1804 (297, 11), shows the south front of the Hall, but there is no indication of a moat on that side. Gregson in 1817 noted 'It (Speke Hall) was surrounded by a moat the remains of which are pretty entire' (Gregson 1817, 202). Walker's view of the west front of the Hall, which Gregson reproduces opposite the text, shows a water-filled moat on that side of the Hall, though, unfortunately, the view is printed in reverse. Bennison's map of 1825 (fig 1c) (Liverpool RO: K) omits any indication of bridges and shows what appears to be a continuous watercourse on the east, north and west sides of the Hall, with the brook in the Clough flowing directly from it. The two dams are marked, but not the small pond by the higher dam nor, apparently, the one at the top of Clough Croft. The Pynes' view of 1829 (Baines 1836, 3, 755) shows a dry moat to the west and north west of the Hall and this feature occurs on all subsequent views from that point. The tithe map of 1844 (fig 1d) (Lancs RO: DRL; copy in Liverpool RO) is a close copy of the 1825 map, and the watercourses show little change from it, although it does show the Clough Croft pond.

The Ordnance Survey 6" to 1 mile 1st edition of 1849 (fig 2a) (sheets 114, 118) names the moat and marks it on the east, north and west sides. The small portion south east of the kitchen courtyard bridge has water in it, the rest appears to be dry. The two dams and the small pond are shown, but there is a leat from the head of the higher dam and the water flows west to the far side of Molyneux Meadow and then south to the Mersey along what is evidently an old watercourse to judge by the 50' contour line; the line of this old watercourse formed the boundary of Wilders Brook field and Molyneux Meadow from at least 1781. The 75' contour line indicates a watercourse north of Stockton's Wood and it seems to appear above ground again at a point east of the Hall and then flows into the Mersey. The 25' contour certainly shows the channel of a watercourse in the Clough, but it appears to be dry.

Shelmerdine's 1869 map (fig 2b) (copy in Liverpool RO: K) indicates the landscaping activity which had been undertaken by the Watts. The dry moat and its two bridges are well defined features, the higher dam and its pond are shown, but

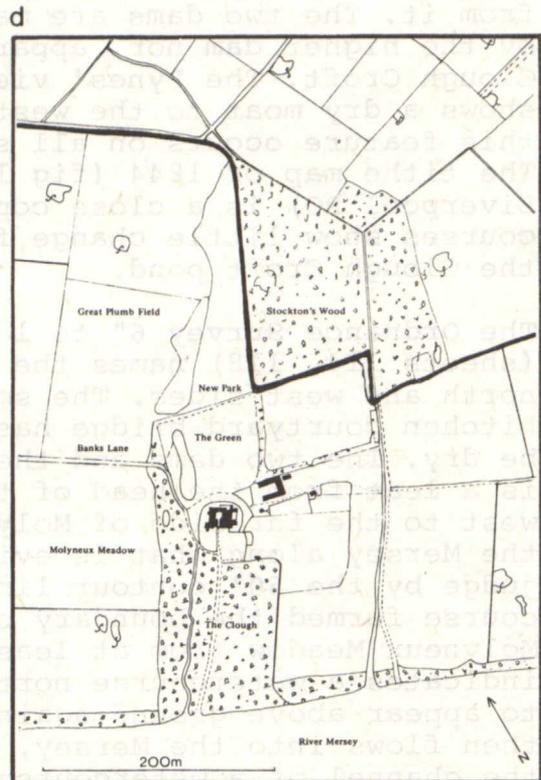
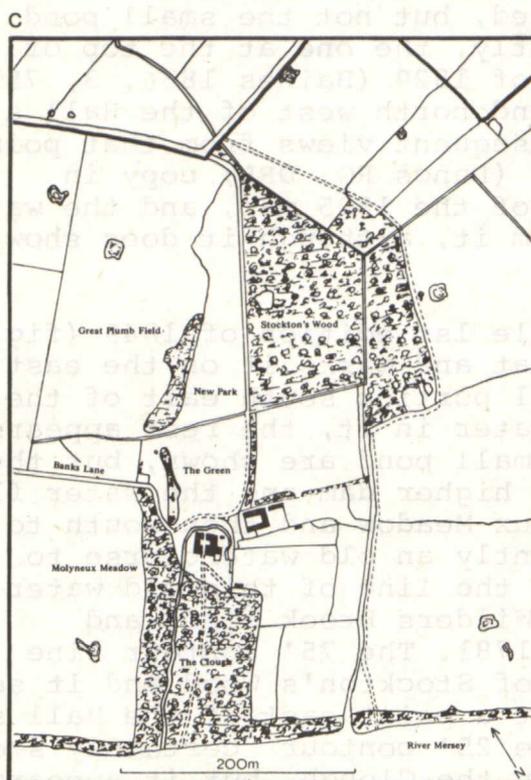
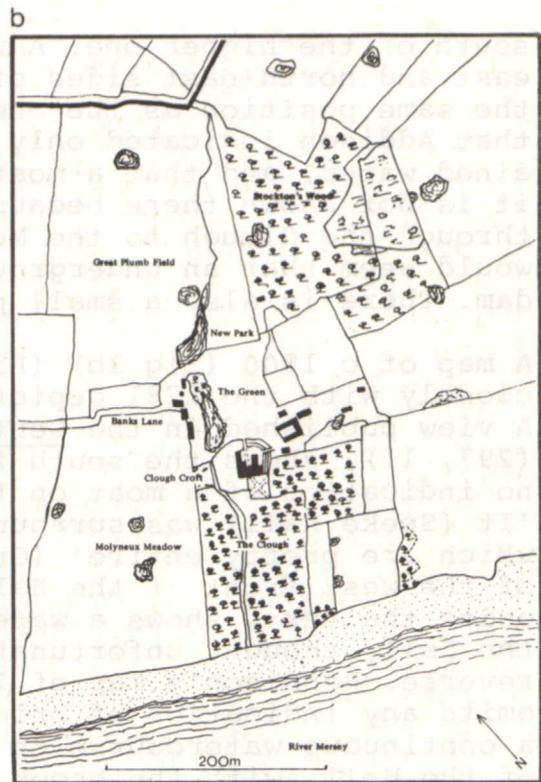
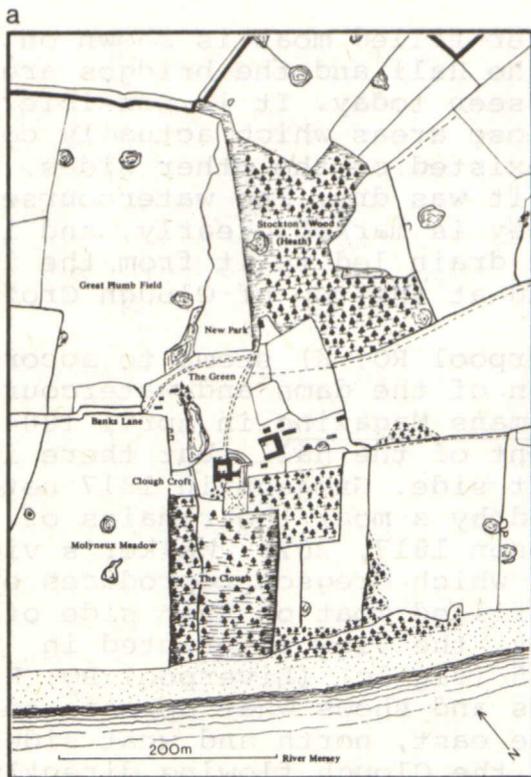


Figure 1 a Addison's map 1781
 b Map of c 1800
 c Bennison's map 1825
 d Tithe map 1844

Modern grid north is indicated

The thick black line indicates the demesne land boundary

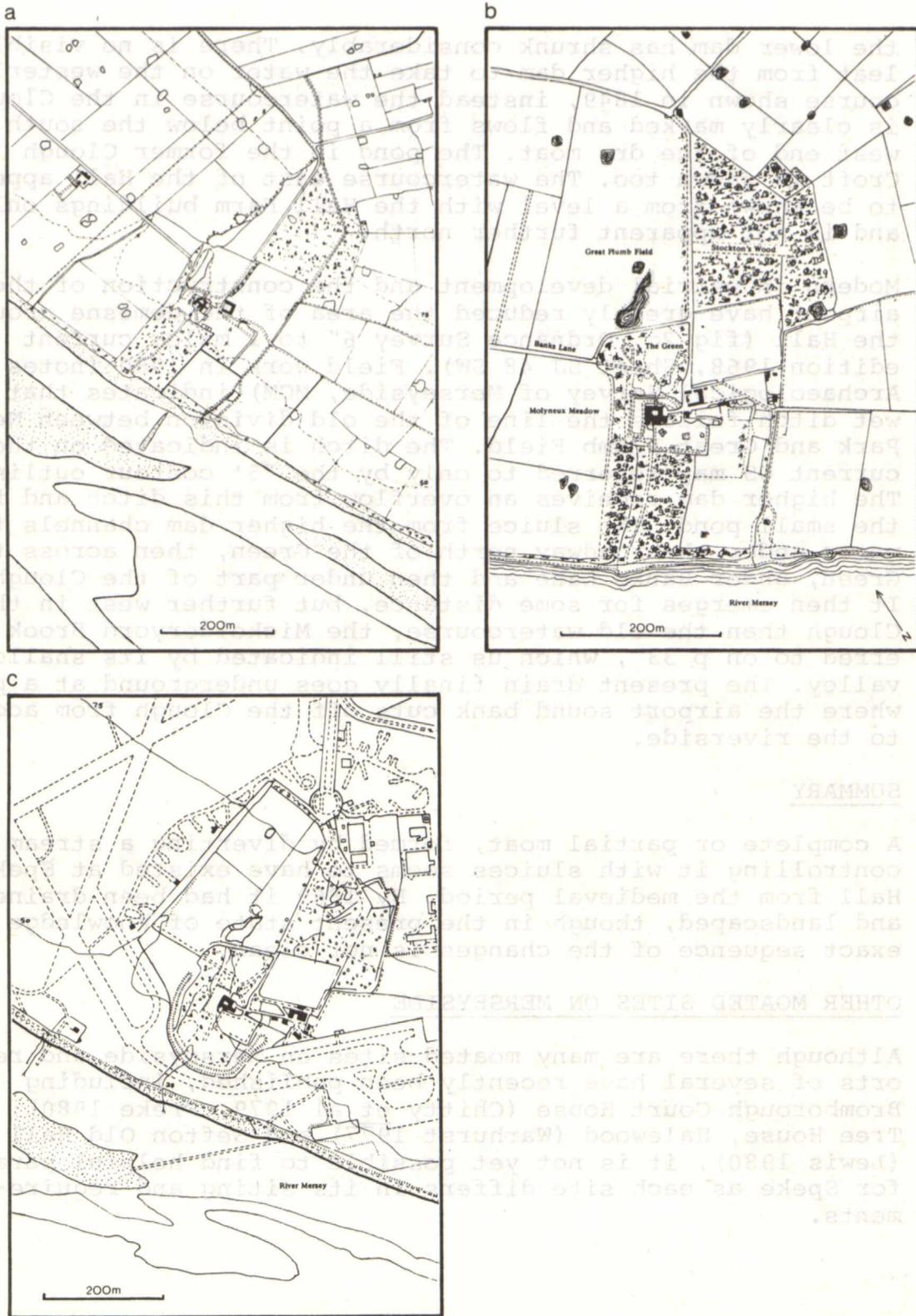


Figure 2 a Ordnance Survey 1st ed. 6" 1849 Sheets 114,118
 b Shelmerdine's map 1869
 c Based upon the 1968 Ordnance Survey 1:10,000 map, courtesy of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, Crown Copyright Reserved
 Modern grid north is indicated on b

SUMMARY

A complete or partial moat, controlling it with sluices Hall from the medieval period and landscaped, though in the exact sequence of the changes OTHER MOATED SITES ON MERSEY Although there are many moated sites of several have recently Bromborough Court House (Chil Tree House, Halswood (Warbur (Lewis 1980), it is not yet for spoke as each site differ means.

the lower dam has shrunk considerably. There is no visible leat from the higher dam to take the water on the westerly course shown in 1849, instead the watercourse in the Clough is clearly marked and flows from a point below the south west end of the dry moat. The pond in the former Clough Croft is shown too. The watercourse east of the Hall appears to be shown from a level with the Hall Farm buildings only, and is not apparent further north.

Modern industrial development and the construction of the airport have greatly reduced the area of the demesne around the Hall (fig 2c, Ordnance Survey 6" to 1 mile, current edition 1968, Sheet SJ 48 SW). Field work in 1980 (notes in Archaeological Survey of Merseyside, MCM) indicates that a wet ditch follows the line of the old division between New Park and Great Plumb Field. The ditch is indicated on the current OS map referred to only by the 75' contour outline. The higher dam receives an overflow from this ditch and from the small pond. The sluice from the higher dam channels the water under the roadway north of the Green, then across the Green, under Banks Lane and then under part of the Clough. It then emerges for some distance, but further west in the Clough than the old watercourse, the Mickelderyord Brook referred to on p 33, which is still indicated by its shallow valley. The present drain finally goes underground at a point where the airport sound bank cuts off the Clough from access to the riverside.

SUMMARY

A complete or partial moat, formed by diverting a stream and controlling it with sluices seems to have existed at Speke Hall from the medieval period. By 1869 it had been drained and landscaped, though in the present state of knowledge the exact sequence of the changes is not clear.

OTHER MOATED SITES ON MERSEYSIDE

Although there are many moated sites on Merseyside and reports of several have recently been published, including Bromborough Court House (Chitty et al 1979, Freke 1980); Yew Tree House, Halewood (Warhurst 1977) and Sefton Old Hall (Lewis 1980), it is not yet possible to find helpful parallels for Speke as each site differs in its siting and requirements.

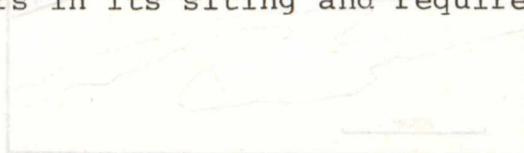


Figure 2 a Ordnance Survey 1st ed. 6" 1849 Sheets 114, 115
b Sheldrake's map 1869
c Based upon the 1968 Ordnance Survey 1:10,000
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Art work by Colette Cowan, Archaeological Survey of Merseyside.

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See p 29 , with the addition of the following:

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