

The Shawbury Moat Story: Background, History & Objectives

Shawbury Parish Council

Background:

The Moat and the surrounding field is owned by the Diocese of Lichfield and leased to Shawbury Parish Council. Prior to 2006 the site had become neglected and was barely accessible; it was also unsightly due to overgrown vegetation, brush and scrub (see photo below). The Parish Council set up a small Working Group to try and tackle the problem of restoring order to the site.



Moat central area (Before)

The Shawbury Moat Project Group came into being with its first tidy-up in April 2006. Much was achieved by the Group and the tireless work of its volunteers. In March 2014, the Group had recorded nearly 2,400 volunteer hours on the physical clearance work, not including the many hundreds of hours taken up by Group Members with consultation, research, meetings etc.

Over this 8 year period, the Group had set about restoring and maintaining the site, obtained funding/grants and initiated improvements in and around the Moat. They worked closely with English Heritage, the Environment Agency and Shropshire Council's Countryside Conservation Service, Biodiversity Officer and Community Archaeologist, the Badger Trust and pond/tree specialists.

The Moat and its surrounding land is subject to an "Area Tree Preservation Order" and the Moat itself has "Ancient Scheduled Monument" status, which precludes digging or disturbance to the surface of the Moat.

The Group engaged local people and displayed some of the ideas it had for the Moat area (including historical research undertaken) and arranged for archaeological and ecological tours. This exercise reaffirmed what the community wished to see happen at the site. A bat walk took place and its Members regularly gave talks about the site to local groups, and displayed the work of the Project at local events, to promote its work.

After much effort and repeated maintenance by the Group's volunteers, the scrub present in the central area of the Moat was reined back to such an extent that the area grassed up and could be regularly maintained (see below).



Moat central area (After)

In 2009, the Group spent time on rejuvenating the pond within the Moat field (see photo on following page), which had become overgrown with scrub/saplings, and was covered in pond weed. Regular attention to this area had seen a marked improvement to the ecology of this area in a very short period.

In 2010, much needed maintenance work (funded by English Heritage and Shawbury Parish Council), was carried out on the trees within the scheduled area of the Moat and the surrounding field. In 2011, the Group was successful on two fronts, in obtaining support/funding for various biodiversity projects on this site.

English Heritage and the Environment Agency funded work to create ponds within the moat ditch, the aim of which was to encourage biodiversity and provide a haven for wildlife, as well as enhancing the ecology of the site. An Archaeologist was present to oversee this work and safeguard the archaeology and ecology present, as well as undertaking palaeo-environmental sampling. The

results of these investigations revealed all artefactual material was from late 19th-20th century with the exception of two 16th-18th century roof tile fragments. Of particular note was the presence of a firm clay layer which is likely to be the original lining of the Moat.



Restoring the Moat ditch/creating ponds

Shropshire Council (through its Community Biodiversity Fund), funded some habitat management work. This tidied up around an area within the Moat field (believed to be an old Mill race), which had hitherto been very difficult to maintain. The maintenance of trees and the removal of cracked willow and scrub visually enhanced the area and should benefit the ecology in this area.

The Group was also successful in obtaining tree/hedge planting through Shropshire Council and the Woodland Trust Community Tree Scheme.

The Group submitted a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) in 2013 to carry out various types of capital works, such as geophysical surveys, historical research, measures to encourage flora/fauna, access improvements, site information, etc. The HLF acknowledged the submission as being a 'strong project' but as it was vying with many other projects, it was unfortunately unsuccessful. This was very disappointing to the Group, as the application met a lot of the HLF objectives. The Parish Council subsequently provided pathways around the Moat field and erected an information board by the A53 entrance.

Moat Tidy-ups

The very nature of the project means that the site will always need to be maintained. Once an area has been "cleared", it doesn't stay cleared. That's why volunteers are so important. It became apparent to members that the

volunteers, although welcome, were insufficient in numbers to maintain the status quo. The Group therefore decided that after 8 years, it had achieved all that it could, and it was now time to 'pass the baton' over to the Parish Council to manage and maintain the site.

The Parish Council regularly has the central area of the Moat and the area adjacent the pathways mowed, with the Moat field cut annually to encourage flora and fauna. In addition, the area of land adjacent (Glebe field) has also had pathways provided. These pathways are well used by the community for walking (with pram or dog) and jogging. The condition/safety of the trees are reviewed and action taken if appropriate.

History:

Little is known about the history and the development of Shawbury village. Some outline research has been carried out by the Group. The usual problems associated with this are knowing where to look, accessibility of information and of course, time.

Shawbury or "Sawesberie" as it used to be known, can trace its roots back to Saxon times when Edric and Elict held the area. "Sawesberie" means "fort in the wood" (bury meaning fort) or an area more fortified than one would expect. Thus the Moat surrounded a fortified dwelling. This location would have been an ideal place to set up such a dwelling, with the natural spring line providing fresh water.

The Roman Road came from Viroconium (Wroxeter), past the Moat area and what are now The Glebelands and the playing fields onto the Wem Road, where it is understood to divert to cross the River Roden at Harcourt Park.

By the time of the Domesday entry in 1086, Gerard held Sawesberie, with the De Sawesberie family living in and ruling the area, which consisted of "arable land for V111 ox team" and "In demesne (meaning landed property or dwellings) there is one team and two serfs, 1 church, 1 priest and 1 mill".



The Saxon "fort" was replaced by a wooden Manor House, and although nothing of it survives today, it probably looked something like the Manor house at

Brockhampton (see photo). The Moat at Shawbury is one of the finest examples in Shropshire of a medieval moated site, hence its designation by English Heritage as a "Scheduled Ancient Monument". The Moat defines a rectangular island, which measures approximately 34 metres east-west and 43 metres north-south. The arms of the Moat are between 13-17 metres wide, up to 2 metres deep, and retain water.

The Church and the Moat are all that really remain of ancient Shawbury. It is likely that there were other buildings in the area, with some evidence of a Mill Race adjacent to the River Roden and the possibility that the old village of Shawbury may lie under the Recreation Ground, which has been glebe land (Diocese of Lichfield) and remains untouched for hundreds of years.



Objectives:

The Parish Council, with the assistance of the local community, seeks not only to conserve and enhance the 13th century Moat and surrounding area, but also aims to encourage the community to use the site, by improving access, and maintaining the site for future generations.

This land is leased to Shawbury Parish Council by the Diocese of Lichfield. Should you wish to contact the Council on issues relating to the site or are interested in helping to maintain the site, please contact the Clerk to Shawbury Parish Council on 01743 236810.