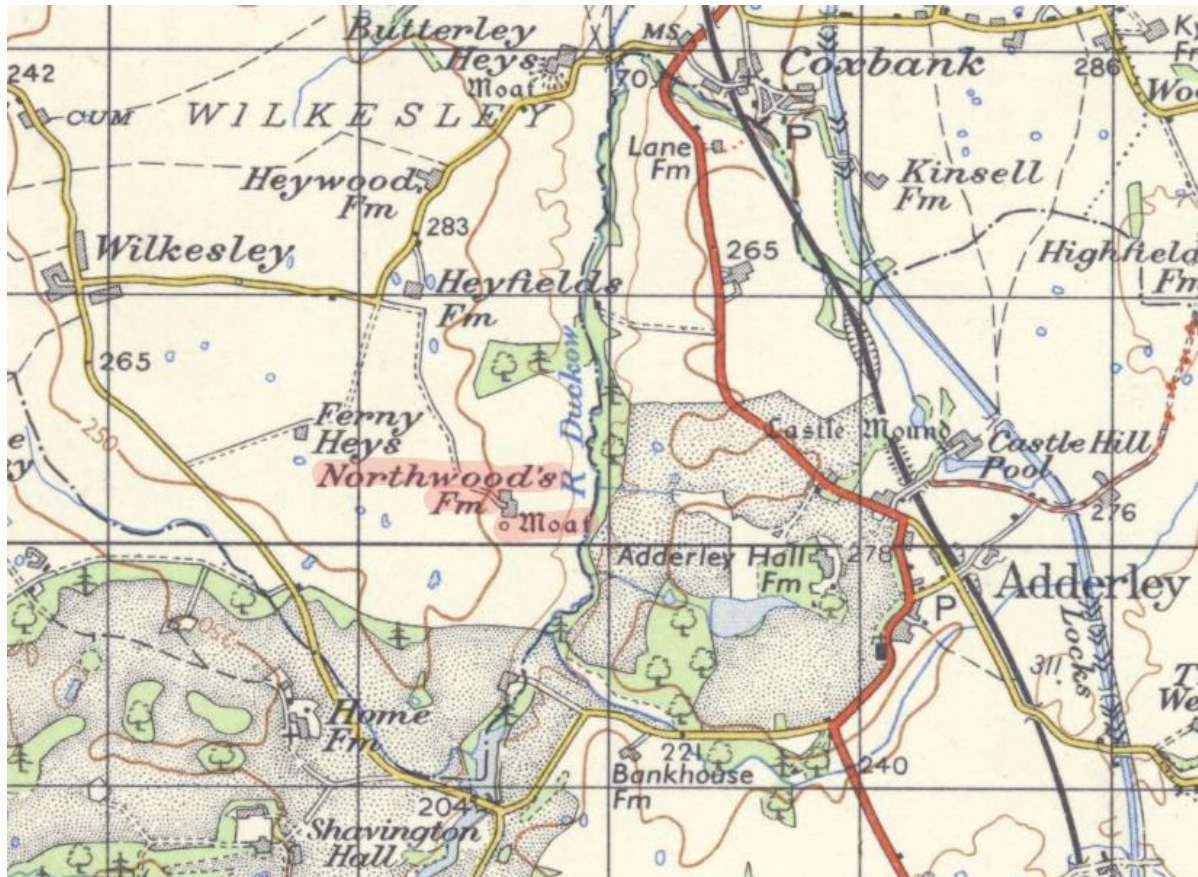


# Audlem and District History Society

History Shorts 55 by Elizabeth Huntbach

## The medieval moated site at Northwoods farm

Discovering one day an italic sign saying *Moat* on an old OS map, I realized that this sign was depicting a place of interest at Northwoods farm in the parish of Dodcott-cum-Wilkesley. This was to be my husband David's and my home for the next 47 years and I wanted to know more about its history.



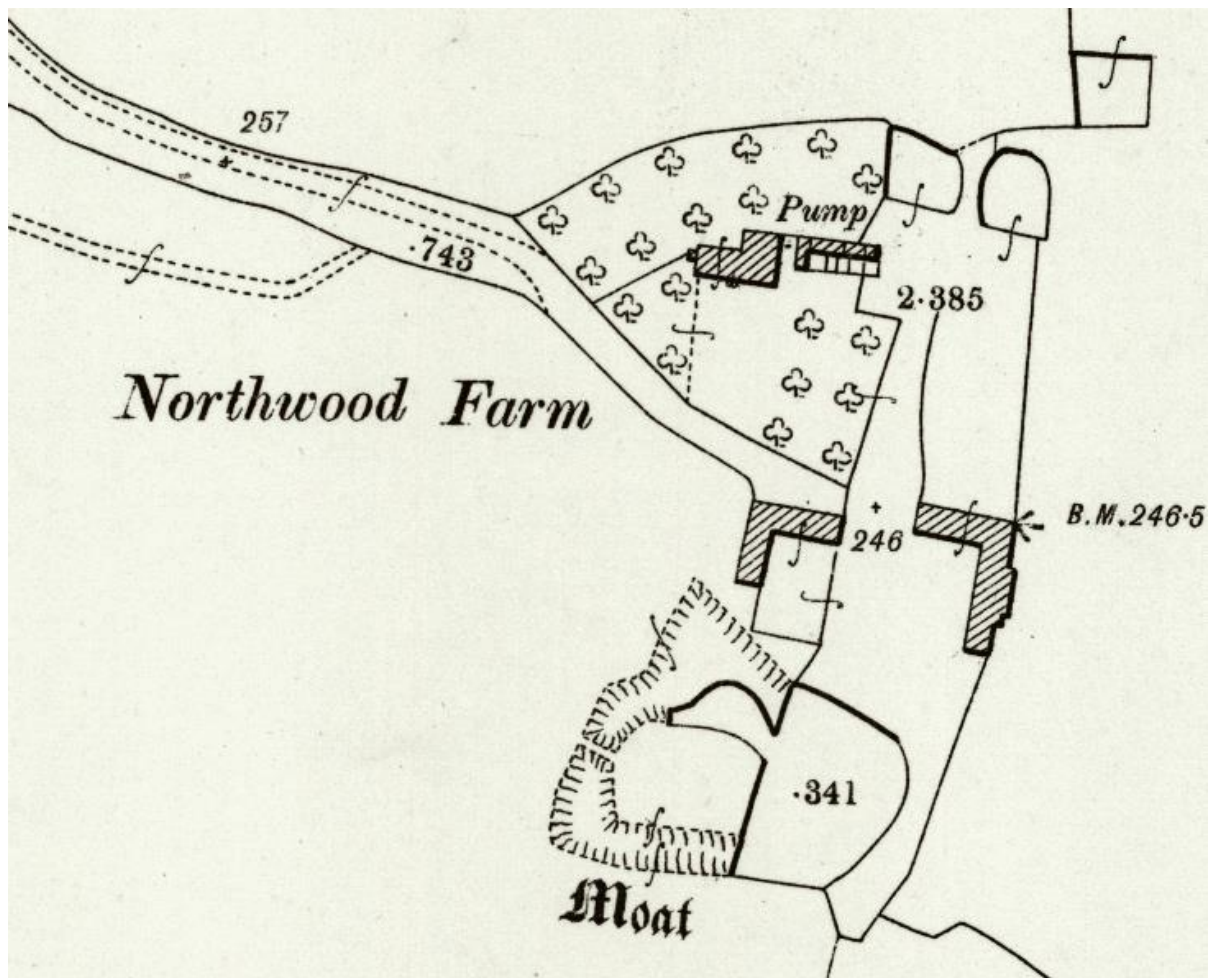
*OS 1" map. Sheet 110 - Stoke on Trent. Published: ca. 1968.  
Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland.*

The site of the moat was a mess with shoulder-high undergrowth, swamp and barbed wire. David wanted to make the area safe and he needed to clear out the moat to its original depth.

From studying old maps and speaking to other farmers I was able to trace a cobbled road through to Calverhall with a stop-off inn dated 1666 on the stone door lintel of a farmhouse. I found the track by following the plough turning over the soil.

Manchester University Archaeology Department staff had visited to survey the site every four years and informed me that they were interested in doing an excavation.

After this I started to investigate the history of the site, making countless visits to Cheshire Records Office and Chester Records Office. I even had to use an ultra-violet light to read the faded latin documents. The first mention of Northwoods was in Chester Court Assizes Papers of 1354 when a murder was committed in a field! At Nantwich Library, I studied James Hall's *History of Nantwich*: the margin scribbles to the original notes were a great help. I followed up with research at Shropshire Records Office, the John Rylands Library (University of Manchester) and the London Library.



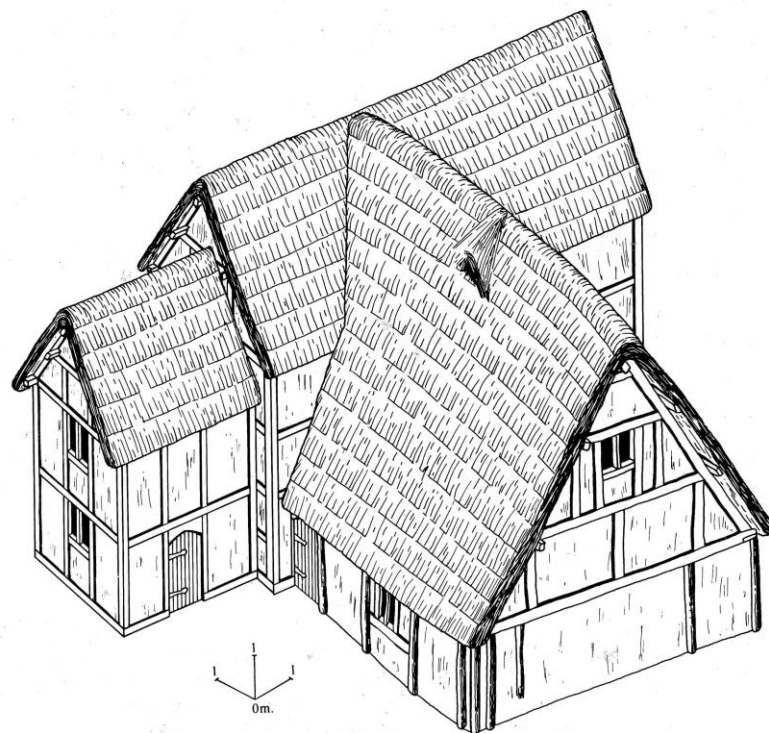
OS 25" map. Cheshire LXVI.9 (Adderley; Audlem; Dodcott cum Wilkesley): 1898.  
 Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland.

During this time, I tried to get Manchester, Liverpool and Keele universities to do a 'dig' but to no avail. Time ran out so the clearance work went ahead while trying to keep the medieval house platform, surrounded by the moat, intact. Six years later David Wilson of Keele University started an excavation carried out over seven summers.

Among the most interesting finds was a silver coin dated from AD1190-1220 found in a post-hole. It had been minted beside Kelso in the Scottish Borders, the place where I originally came from. I have this coin with two others found, but the majority of the medieval and post-medieval pottery together with tile shards,

buckles, buttons and parts of iron objects I donated to the City Museum in Stoke on Trent. All finds, plans and reports are published in a book by the museum. \*

There had been three phases in the life of the structure, with extensions and an upper floor added. The first phase showed evidence of a hearth in the centre, even showing the spit stake holes. About 1350 a cross-wing was added and a partition screen. The post-holes of a ladder to the solar were revealed, so we could date when the upstairs were added. In the late 14<sup>th</sup> or early 15<sup>th</sup> century the third part was added over what had been the garden, where lots of pottery shards were found. These indicated the wealth of the occupants. Documents consulted also showed that rents and disputes were settled here. It was interesting to find that in 1581, widow Taylor and later, widow Poole, were both able to continue their tenancies on the deaths of their husbands.



*External view of what the homestead might have looked like in the late 14<sup>th</sup>/early 15<sup>th</sup> century \**

In 1832 William Huntbach, David's great, great grandfather was a tenant until his son succeeded him in 1866. Northwoods was one of the farms sold off by Combermere Abbey in 1920. It returned to the Huntbach family in 1962, when David's father bought it for David to farm.

*\*Excavation of a medieval moated site at Northwoods farm, Dodcott-cum-Wilkesley, Cheshire. David Wilson, Alan Bagnall and Beryl Taylor. Staffordshire Archaeological Studies No. 9, 1997 (City Museum & Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent)*