

NOTES

MEDIEVAL NEW ALRESFORD REVISITED

Godfrey de Lucy, bishop of Winchester, founded the market town of New Alresford in the year 1200 (Luard 1865, ii, 252). A story has grown up that medieval Alresford was provided with new trade routes and thus became a centre of national importance. Recent writers have repeated this story (Beresford 1959, 190–2; Hughes 1976, 91–2; Platt 1984, 52). The story, which is quite unfounded, has three parts.

John Trussell in c. 1640 began the tradition that de Lucy constructed a canal between Alresford and Winchester. I have argued elsewhere that this tradition is false (Roberts 1985).

Secondly, John Duthy in 1839 seems to have been the first to claim that Henry III further increased Alresford's trade when he built a new road between Alresford and Alton (Duthy 1839, 88 and 103). This belief stems from an apparent misreading of a charter of 1269 in which the king ordered the felling of woodland adjacent to the road called 'the pass of Alton' (Cal Chart R 1257–1300, 122; Platt 1984, 229). The road was already in existence by 1248 (Bellamy 1973, 43).

Thirdly, the *Victoria County History* described Alresford – without evidence – as one of the ten great wool towns of fourteenth century England (VCH Hants III, 351). This claim is false and may derive from a simple confusion between Alresford and Winchester. Winchester was indeed one of the ten English staple towns for wool at that time (Lloyd 1977, 115).

The truth is much less spectacular than the story. Alresford was never more than a minor centre for the wool trade. In 1271–4, at least 327 Englishmen were licensed to export wool. Of these, 40 came from Winchester, 19 from Southampton, 15 from Andover and only 3 from Alresford. Between May 1273 and January 1274, the merchants of Winchester were authorized to export 945 sacks of wool, the merchants of Alresford only 20 (Lloyd

1977, 50–1). In the 14th century, wool from the bishop of Winchester's estates in Hampshire was stored for sale at Wolvesey Palace, not at Alresford (*op cit* 311). Nor was Alresford a major cloth town in the 14th century. In 1394–5 and 1398–9, about 4400 cloths were sold in Winchester, whereas in 1394–5 Alresford accounted for only 53 standard cloths of assize, an output comparable to that of small towns such as Alton and Fareham (Keene 1895, 315–7). Alresford's trade was at a low ebb in the 15th century. In 1443–4, the town attracted only 10 cartloads of goods from Southampton, while Romsey attracted 202, Winchester 367 and Salisbury 861 (Coleman 1960–61, i, 144 map). In terms of taxable wealth, Winchester was assessed at over £51 and ranked 17th town in England for the lay subsidy of 1334 whereas Alresford borough was assessed at £4 19s 6d (Glasscock 1975, 121; Hoskins 1972, 238). In 1523–7, Winchester – now ranked 37th town in England – was assessed at £132 and Alresford at £16 10s (HRO 23M73; Hoskins 1972, 239).

This story of modest achievement is echoed in the records of Alresford's market tolls and the payment for market stalls made to the bishop of Winchester as lord of the borough. A random selection of bishopric pipe rolls of the early 13th century suggests that the annual payments of tolls and stallage at that time were generally around £1 (e.g. HRO Eccl 159285, 159288, 159457). In the second half of the century, annual payments rose to between £2 and £3 (e.g. HRO Eccl 159297, 159301, 159309). In the first half of the 14th century, annual payments seem generally to have fallen below £2 (e.g. HRO Eccl 159408, 159332, 159357). In 1347–8, the payment was £1 6s 8d, but in the plague year of 1348–9 it fell abruptly to 6s 8d and it was specifically stated in the bishopric pipe roll that the amount was 'so small this year because of the pestilence' (HRO Eccl 159357, 159358). Payments for

tolls and stallage seem to have remained low; 5s 9d in 1400-1, 4s 6d in 1451-2, 5s 2d in 1501-2 and 5s 4d in 1550-1. In 1451-2, only 12 market stalls were recorded (HRO Eccl 159405, 159442, 155851, 155889).

If Alresford's trade and wealth were modest, its population was correspondingly small in number and increased little during the Middle Ages. In 1210-11, there were 90 messuages in Alresford - not 45 as stated by Beresford (Holt 1964, 148; Beresford 1959, 191). If this implies 90 households and we suppose that the average household size was 4.75 people, then we have a population of approximately 430 (Hallam 1981, 246). Between 1223 and 1361, the rent for the borough rose gradually from £15 8s 8d to £16 12s 9d (HRO Eccl 1599278, 159371). Some of this increase represents the building of a few new houses, but after the mid 14th century this modest expansion ceased and the borough rent was still £16 12s 9d in 1550-1 (HRO Eccl 155889). Although the national population fluctuated substantially

during the 13th and 14th centuries, there is no direct evidence for Alresford and there are no poll tax returns for 1377-81 from which Alresford's population at that time could be ascertained (Beresford 1959, 200). According to a survey of 1552, there were 122 houses in Alresford (HRO Eccl 136/1, 118-128). Multiplying again by 4.75 (Youings 1984, 132) we have a population of about 580, an increase of only one third on the population of 1210.

The survey shows that 16th century Alresford was a small town whose houses clustered around East, West and Broad Street. There is no documentary or archaeological evidence to suggest that it was larger than this in the Middle Ages and one is forced to conclude that the town was built on quite a different scale from a major centre such as medieval Winchester. Alresford was a living and moderately thriving community, but not the outstanding success which some writers describe (Betty 1986, 57-8).

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Author: Edward Roberts, King Alfred's College, Winchester.

A POSSIBLE ICEHOUSE AT MILNETHORPE, WINCHESTER

Abstract

A survey of a later 19th century structure, possibly an icehouse at Milnethorpe, Winchester, was undertaken by Winchester Archaeology Office in 1986. It is of an unusual type and may have been used for the cold storage of foodstuffs

rather than the keeping of ice. The builders clearly considered its additional function as a landscape feature, showing concern for both its location and decoration.

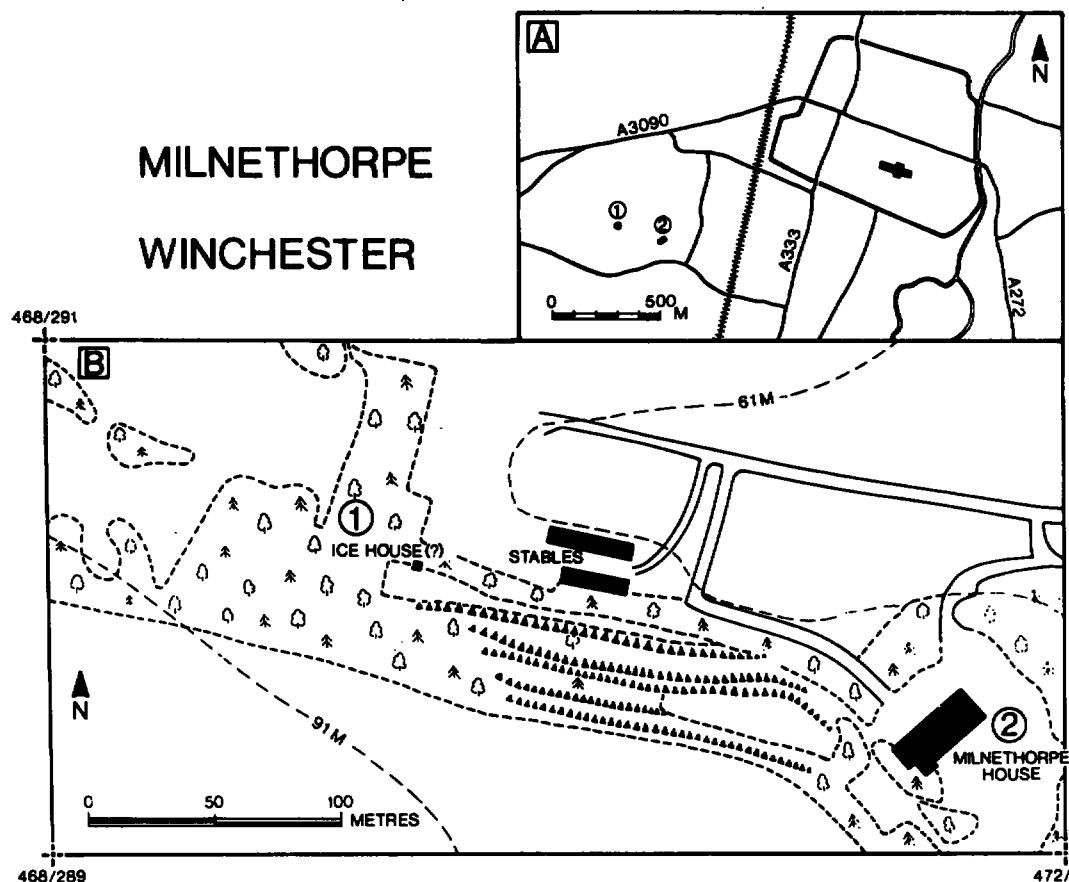


Fig 1. A Location of possible Icehouse in relation to Winchester. (1) The structure. (2) Milnethorpe House. B Plan showing major topographic features. Modern buildings have been excluded. Information from OS 25" 1970. Stables taken from 1909 edition.