

AN EARLY-MEDIEVAL BARN AT BISHOPS WALTHAM? NEW LIGHT ON THE 'PALACE STABLES'

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ABSTRACT

Until 1967, a surviving part of a large non-domestic building stood in what had once been the outer service court of the medieval palace of the bishops of Winchester at Bishop's Waltham, Hants. This building had been given the name 'Palace Stables' in relatively modern times but, in 1967, its original function and age were uncertain. Some timbers from its three oldest trusses have fortunately been preserved and were tree-ring dated in 2008. This showed, with 95% probability, that they had been felled between 1300 and 1315. Examination of all surviving bishopric pipe rolls between 1296/97 and 1318/19 has revealed only one likely match for the now-demolished building; this was the bishop's great barn, probably later known as the long barn. Objections to this identification are discussed, as are persuasive arguments in its favour.

INTRODUCTION

The episcopal palace at Bishops Waltham, which is now largely ruinous, was one of the major houses of the medieval bishops of Winchester. Its core residential buildings, which stood within a moated courtyard, have been intensively studied (Hare 1987 and 1988). Less well-known, however, is a part of the episcopal complex that formerly stood in an outer service court, immediately north of the main moated area. Until 1967, the most important survival on this site was a medieval building known as the 'Palace Stables'. This was recorded before demolition and was discussed at length in an article by Elizabeth Lewis in *Proceedings* for 1985 (Lewis 1985, 88–99). At that time, the

construction-date of the building had not been scientifically established but some of the historic roof timbers were salvaged and are now in store at the Weald and Downland Open Air Museum at Singleton (Sussex). In 2008, three of these timbers were tree-ring dated by Dr Martin Bridge of the Oxford Dendrochronology Laboratory and the date that he established calls for a re-evaluation of the original form and function of the building (Bridge 2008).

THE 'PALACE STABLES'

The 'Palace Stables' stood north of the palace moat and immediately to the east of Bishops Waltham Pond (Fig. 1). It had both masonry and timber-framed elements. The side facing the Pond comprised a flint wall 4.5m (14' 9") high and, in the early 1960s, 35.8m (117' 9") in length. This wall appeared to have been free-standing in its original phase – probably in the twelfth century – but in a second phase, a timber-framed, single-aisled building with a slate roof was constructed on its east side. Thus one side of the roof of this building rested on the earlier wall while the other was supported by timber arcade posts (Fig. 2) (Lewis, 1985, 89). At 2.14m (7' 0") to the east of the arcade, stone footings were found which were interpreted as the base for the wall of an aisle to the main building 'and apparently coeval with it' (Mercer in Lewis, 96). No evidence for a hearth was found within the building and there was no soot on its roof timbers (Lewis 1985, 90).

The nave roof of the building survived until 1967. The majority was of a locally common form technically known as 'staggered-butt-

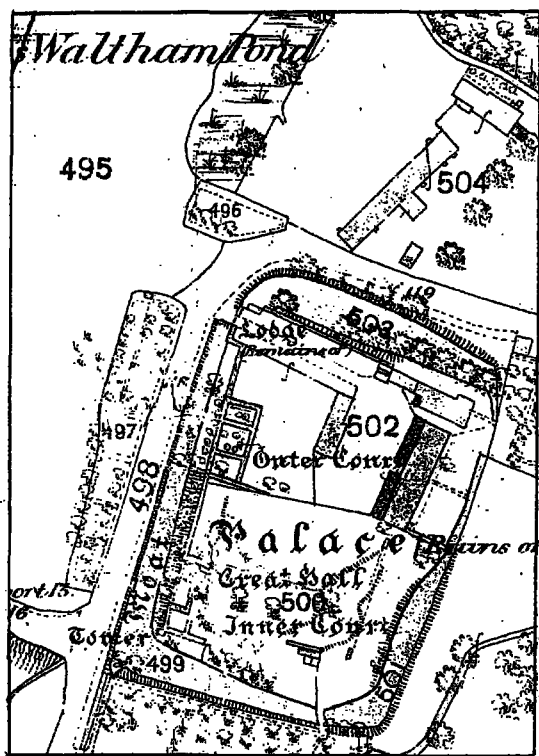


Fig. 1 Bishops Waltham Palace c. 1870. The 'Palace Stables' is the long building north of the moated area and adjacent to number 504. Bishops Waltham Pond is marked number 495 (O.S. 25" map first edn.).

purlin' and probably dated to the eighteenth or nineteenth century (NMR BB68/2050). Three trusses, however, were of a rare form of king-post construction and belonged to a small group of thirteenth or early-fourteenth century roofs found in the south-east of England (NMR BB65/2567). In 1983, these roofs had all been found on high-status buildings (Munby *et al.* 1983) but two similar roofs discovered at Fareham and Winchester in the 1990s were on relatively small urban houses (Roberts 2003, 27–9). Recent research in France has confirmed the close similarities between these roofs and those of their contemporaries in Normandy, indicating an intriguing cross-channel carpentry tradition (Munby *et al.* 1983; Epauld 2007, 241).

In the late-fifteenth or early sixteenth century,

the aisle of the 'Palace Stables' building was demolished and the posts of the arcade were encased in a brick wall. This was very probably the work of Bishop Langton or possibly Bishop Fox (Hare 1988, 245). In post-medieval phases, a floor was inserted to create a loft and the building was used at one time to house livestock (Lewis 1985, 90). On a map of 1785, it is called 'a malthouse' so that the name 'Palace Stables' did not become fully established until a later but unknown date (HRO 78M71). Given that the original rafters were unscooted and that there was no trace of a hearth, Lewis concluded that the building was non-domestic. There was no evidence for an original loft floor so that the internal space would have been undivided between the ground and the roof apex some 9.1m (30' 0") above. This would suggest that crop storage – in a word, a barn – was the most likely original function of the building (Lewis 1985, 90).

DATE AND FUNCTION

In a contribution to Lewis's article, Eric Mercer dated the roof timbers to 'a period either side of c. 1300', while Munby preferred a late-13th-century date (Mercer in Lewis 1985, 96). Even though these suggestions were too broad and tentative to support documentary research, they are impressive in the light of recent dendrochronology based on four matching samples. This established a date range of tree rings from 1133 to 1291 with some sapwood rings at the end of the chronological sequence. This produced a felling date-range of 1300–1315 with 95% probability (Bridge 2008). In an attempt to identify the 'Palace Stables' within the documentary sources, all the bishopric of Winchester pipe rolls between 1296/97 and 1318/19 have been studied. These documents are a remarkable survival and, in this instance, offer an unbroken run except for the roll for 1303/04 which is missing (Britnell *ed.* 2003, 184). While this gap clearly denies us some possibly useful information, it is unlikely that it held the entire building accounts for a large building. Great barns on bishopric estates

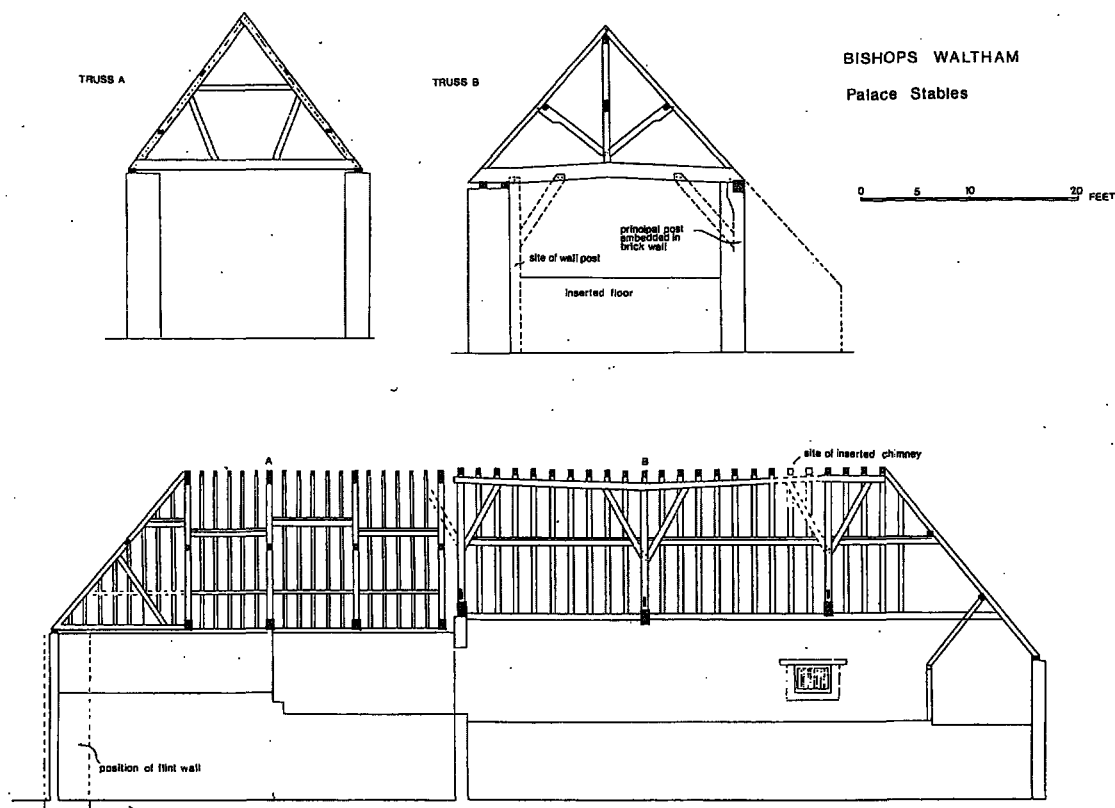


Fig. 2 Sections of the 'Palace Stables' drawn prior to demolition (after Lewis 1985). Truss A is part of the post-medieval staggered-butt-purlin roof. Truss B is one of three king-post trusses tree-ring dated to 1300–15.

generally took at least two years to construct: for example, the manorial barn at Burghclere in 1451/52 and 1452/53 (HRO 11M59/B1/188 and 189) and the manorial barn at Overton in 1496/97 and 1497/98 (Roberts 1996, 102–3). The bishop's barn at Ivinghoe (Bucks) built in 1309/10 seems to be an exception (see below) (Titow 1969, 203–4).

In the surviving rolls between 1296/97 and 1318/19 there are numerous records of repairs to the palace complex but only a few references to new building, signalled by the Latin '*de novo*', or building 'anew'. Some of these clearly apply to the inner court, as when a great porch or pentice was made anew above the hall door in 1313/14 (HRO 11M59/B1/69). Two references,

however, seem plausibly to apply to buildings beyond the moated inner court. One, also in 1313/14, deals with raising anew a building made from old timber for stabling carthorses. The building was thatched with straw and seems to have been entirely timber-framed because there is no reference to masonry. The total cost of building work was 19s 3d (c. £0.96) (ibid). Such a building, covered with straw rather than the slates recorded by excavators at the 'Palace Stables' site (Lewis 1985, 90) and only requiring height enough for carthorses, is not a convincing match for the 'Palace Stables'.

The second possible match occurs in the building anew of part of the great barn (*magna grangia*) between 1301/02 and 1305/06. In

1301/02 a carpenter rebuilt anew the great barn which had partly collapsed through rotten timber; the damaged part of the barn was roofed and 15,000 large slates were bought for the purpose. In this roll, the term 'anew' (*de novo*) is used even though it is clear that the work involved rebuilding rather than building from scratch. The cost of the timber, felling, trimming and transportation is not recorded but, even so, the carpenter's task could not have been very great for the whole cost of work on the great barn that year was only £3 7s 9d (c. £3.36) (HRO 11M59/B1/58; Page 1996, 254). During the ensuing four years, work proceeded at a leisurely pace. In 1302/03, roofing the great barn continued and ironwork was bought to repair its great door. The sum of building costs that year – although not necessarily all for work on the barn – was £2 1s 11½d (c. £2.10) (HRO 11M59/B1/59). The roll for the following year is missing and the roll for 1304/05 records a total of £1 8s 4¼d (c. £1.42) building costs and, in particular, the purchase of nails for eaves boards and 5,000 slates for an unspecified use (HRO 11M59/B1/60).

Finally, in 1305/06 the 'skeling' of the great barn was made anew. Timber was felled and sawn for the same and it was roofed anew with slates (HRO 11M59/B1/61). Here it is less clear whether *de novo* meant a new build or a rebuild of part of the 'skeling' but, as the work cost only 8s 2½d (£0.41), the latter is far more likely. 'Skeling' (also skeeling) is a dialect word once used in Wiltshire and Hampshire to denote a lean-to or penthouse beside the main body of a building (Rogers 1979). For example, in 1695 a 'skelling' was added to the north side of Uphill Farm, Twyford (Roberts and Gale 1995, 186) and in a plan of Manor Farm, Botley of c. 1740 an outshot or lean-to beside the main body of the house is marked '*Brewhouse Skeeling'd Down*' (HRO 84M94/14/19; Roberts 2003, 173). This outshot or lean-to may still be seen today (HRO 65M89/Z29/15).

As already stated, the height of the 'Palace Stables', and the fact that it lacked any evidence of original internal partitions or hearth, point to its intended use as a barn. But was it the great barn of the pipe rolls of 1301–06? The fact that

only one 'skeling' is mentioned in the relevant pipe rolls and that a lean-to beside the main body of a building is effectively a single aisle suggests that the 'Palace Stables' was indeed a remnant of the great barn. (It should be noted that single-aisled barns are very rare in Hampshire). Although 35.8m long just before demolition, the 25" O.S. map of 1870 shows that it was then c. 48m (c.158' 0") long (Fig. 1); longer even than the great Abbey Barn that still stands at Titchfield, which is 46.5m (153' 0") in length (Roberts 2000) and considerably longer than the great barn of 1451 on the bishop of Winchester's manor farm at Burghclere, which is 38.8m (127' 9") long (Roberts 2003, 230). If its length in 1870, prefigured by its length on a plan of 1785 (HRO 78M71), represented its length in the Middle Ages, such a building might well have been called a 'long barn' (see the discussion below).

It is impossible to calculate the full cost of the partial rebuilding of the great barn. This is partly because the major cost of the timber and felling is not mentioned in the pipe roll entry for Bishops Waltham of 1301–02, or in rolls of the five preceding years. Furthermore, as already stated, the roll for 1303–04 is lost and the roll for 1304/05 gives the cost for items without attributing them to a specific building. That said, the total cost of the partial rebuilding may not have exceeded £5 and this low figure calls for explanation. In view of the fact that a new barn on the bishopric manor of Ivinghoe (Bucks) in 1309/10 cost the considerable sum of £83 8s 0¼d (£83.40) (Titow 1969, 203–4), how could the barn at Bishops Waltham be called 'great' when its partial rebuilding cost relatively little?

A plausible answer surely lies in the word 'partial'. The pipe roll of 1301/02 explicitly states that only part of the barn had collapsed. We do not know how much, of course, but it is not impossible that little more than the three king-post trusses, still standing in 1967 and part of the aisle (Fig. 2) were the sum of what needed to be made anew. Certainly, most of the work seems to have involved repairs to the roof and, as we have seen, the cost of timber, felling, trimming and transportation was not recorded.

These items accounted for £40 3s 0½d (£40.15) at Ivinghoe, or almost half the cost of the entire barn (ibid).

Finally, Lewis makes a persuasive suggestion that the great barn had been renamed the 'long barn' by 1438/39 (Lewis 1985, 90) when it was recorded that roof-workers covered with slates the side of the long barn facing the Pond (*cum sclattis latus longe grangie versus stagnum*) (HRO 11M59/B2/11/68). This is an apt description of the position of the 'Palace Stables' whose west side was adjacent and parallel to Bishops Waltham Pond (Fig. 1). Further weight can be added to Lewis's view by the fact that in the mid-fifteenth century, tiles were placed on new buildings at Bishops Waltham, whereas slates were used to maintain older ones (Hare 1988, 243). Moreover, the bishopric pipe roll for the same year of 1438/49 records the payment of two stonemasons to repair the corner of the long barn (HRO 11M59/B1/180). It should be noted that medieval Bishops Waltham had no ready supply of building stone and that it is most unlikely that there was more than one barn with a masonry element within the palace complex.

CONCLUSION

It would seem very likely, then, that the building

called the 'Palace Stables' was a remnant of the bishop's great barn, partly renewed in the early-fourteenth century. The information supplied by the magnificent series of bishopric pipe rolls may not be completely conclusive but within the tree-ring date-range of the Palace Stables, the rolls present only one account of new building work that matches its structure. This is the great barn with its single aisle or 'skeling'; and the fact that single-aisled barns are very rare in Hampshire strengthens the case. It was with remarkable foresight that the late Stuart Rigold ensured the preservation of timbers from the building at the time of demolition; timbers that have provided a tree-ring date-range and an opportunity to recover some of the history of an important building.

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