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William of Wykeham's House at East Meon, Hants.

By EDWARD ROBERTS

The Court House at East Meon was a country residence of the medieval bishops of Winchester. Of this residence, the great hall, a solar, and a garderobe block survive largely intact. The Court House is remarkable not only for its fine state of preservation but also because of the detailed record of its development to be found in the magnificent records of the bishopric of Winchester. Until recently, there had been disagreement as to the date of its construction but the discovery of the original building accounts has allowed this to be established with certainty. Unlike larger bishopric residences which could accommodate the entire episcopal household for long periods, it seems to have served partly as a retreat for a select number of the bishop's household or friends. Although the name 'Court House' is not recorded until 1647, it is used here to denote the medieval house. All places referred to in the text are in Hampshire, unless otherwise stated.

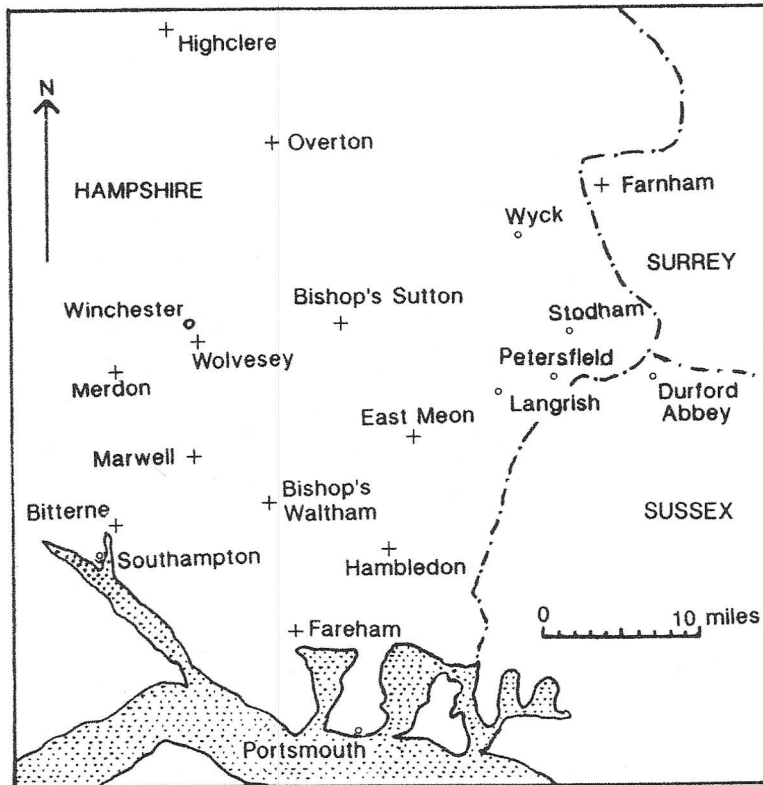
Note on dating: this study is principally based on the Winchester bishopric pipe rolls in which the accounting year ran from Michaelmas to Michaelmas (29 September). I have indicated this by giving the two consecutive dates separated by an oblique line.

INTRODUCTION

The village of East Meon (called 'Menes' in the bishopric pipe rolls) lies some twenty-two kilometres (fourteen miles) east of Winchester and about five miles west of Hampshire's boundary with Sussex (Illus. 1). In the centre of the village, beside a fine twelfth-century church, stands the Court House, formerly a country residence of the medieval bishops of Winchester.

From the early Middle Ages until the mid-nineteenth century the Court House was the centre of a large manor of about 19,000 acres (V.C.H. Hants. iii, 64, 76, 78). During the same period, the bishops were also rectors of the parish of East Meon (V.C.H. Hants. ii, 26; H.R.O. East Meon tithe award). Thus it was that, for several centuries, the Court House was both an episcopal manor house and rectory. This duality is reflected in the bishopric of Winchester pipe rolls where building works within the *curia* are accounted for under two headings: *Menes manerium* for the manorial farm buildings and *Menes ecclesia* for the adjacent rectorial mansion (Postan 1973, 224). (However, this neat, theoretical distinction did not always reflect the reality of a *curia* that functioned as a unit and occasionally there seems to have been uncertainty as to whether an item should be entered under *manerium* or *ecclesia*.)

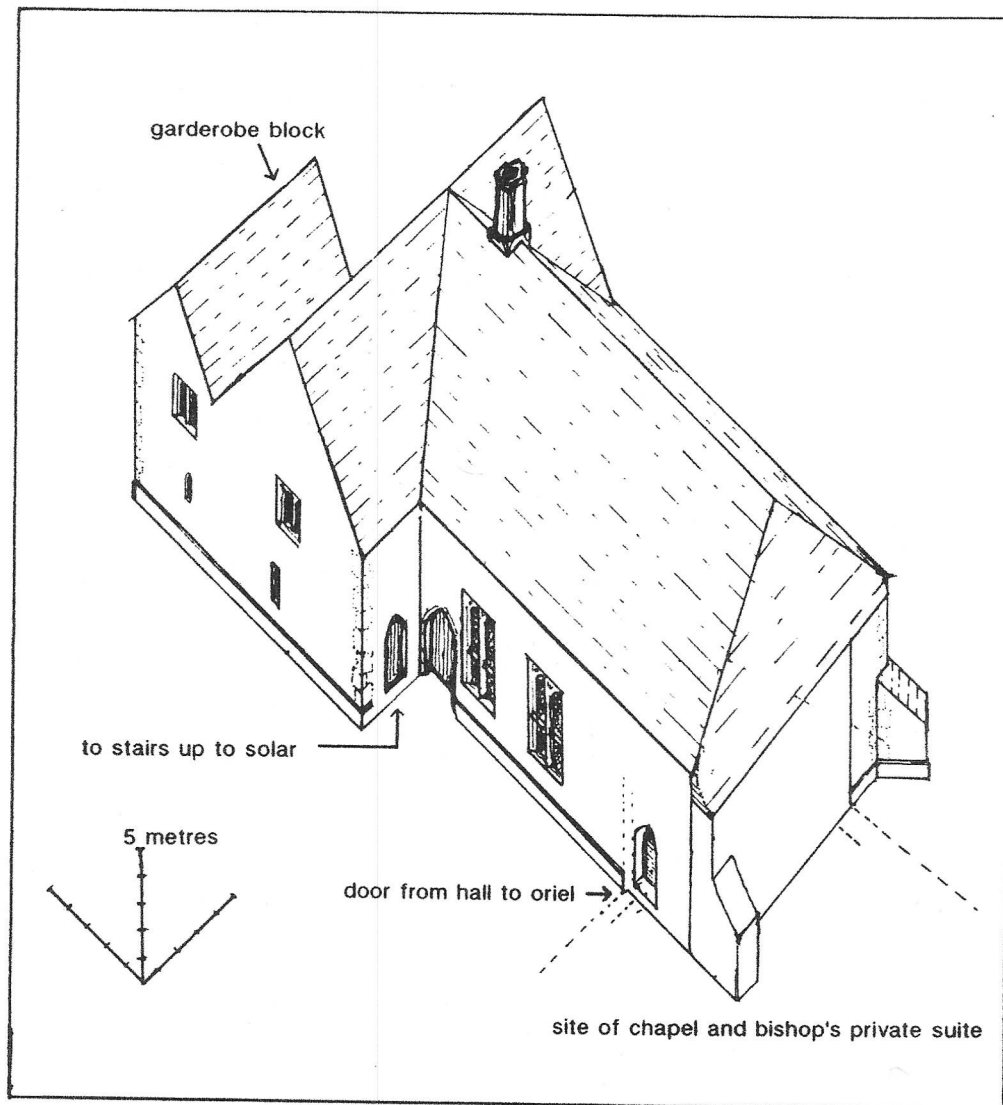
The Court House has long been recognized as an exceptionally well-preserved medieval house. It comprises a great hall at the north end of which is a cross-wing



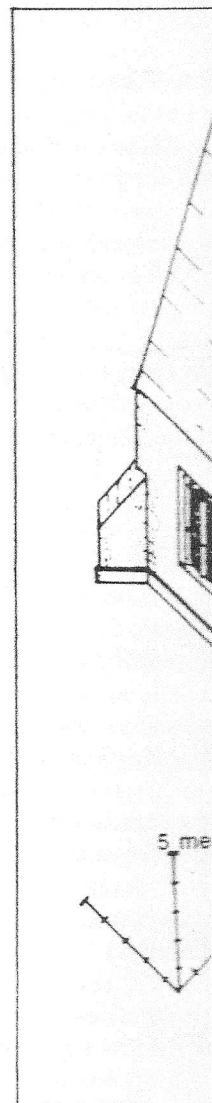
Illus. 1. William of Wykeham's House: Places mentioned in the text. Residences of the bishops' of Winchester are marked with a cross. Durford Abbey is sometimes misnamed 'Durfold' (e.g. by Nairn and Pevsner 1965, 314)

containing a solar, or great chamber, above a buttery and pantry. A garderobe block is attached to the cross-wing (Illus. 2 and 3). The timber roofs, massive stone walls, stairs, the chimney-piece in the solar, most doors and some windows appear to be original and to date from one building campaign. An apparent lack of relevant documentation has, however, obliged scholars to rely solely upon architectural evidence in suggesting a building date. Such suggestions have ranged from the early years of William Wykeham's episcopate (which began in 1367) to the first half of the fifteenth century (Faulkner 1967, 191; Wood 1965, 64).

Fortunately, the original building accounts have recently been discovered among the pipe rolls of the bishopric of Winchester. These show that the Court House was built in 1395-97, during the latter part of Wykeham's episcopate (Roberts 1989, 14). Thus it takes its place among a distinguished group of buildings which were constructed or remodelled by Wykeham. These include not only the nave of Winchester Cathedral, Winchester College, and New College, Oxford, but — more pertinently — bishopric residences at Wolvesey Palace in Winchester (Biddle 1986, 18), Bishop's Waltham



Illus. 2. William of Wykeham's House: view from the south-east. The chimney to the chamber block and the door to the oriel have been reinstated



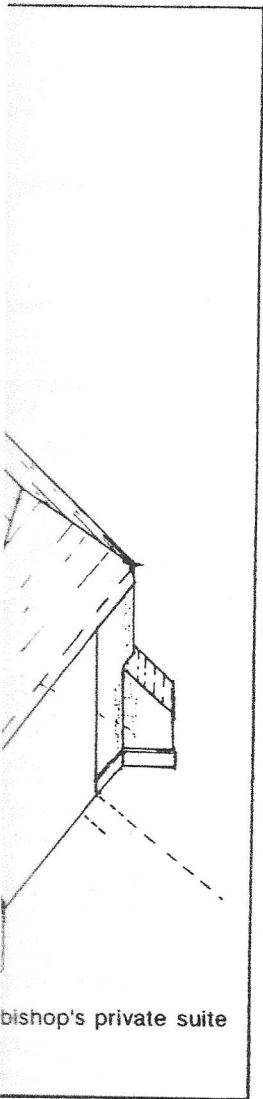
Illus. 3. William of Wykeham's House: view from the north-west

(Hare 1987, 6), Highclere (Dunlop 1940, 37), and Farnham Castle, Surrey (Brooks 1985, 7, 13).

Although Wykeham's building works at East Meon were on a more modest scale than those at his great palaces at Wolvesey and Bishop's Waltham, the dimensions of the surviving structures are still impressive. Moreover, they were supervised — and in all probability designed — by no less a person than William Wynford, Wykeham's master mason (Harvey 1984, 352–57). The building accounts record the construction of

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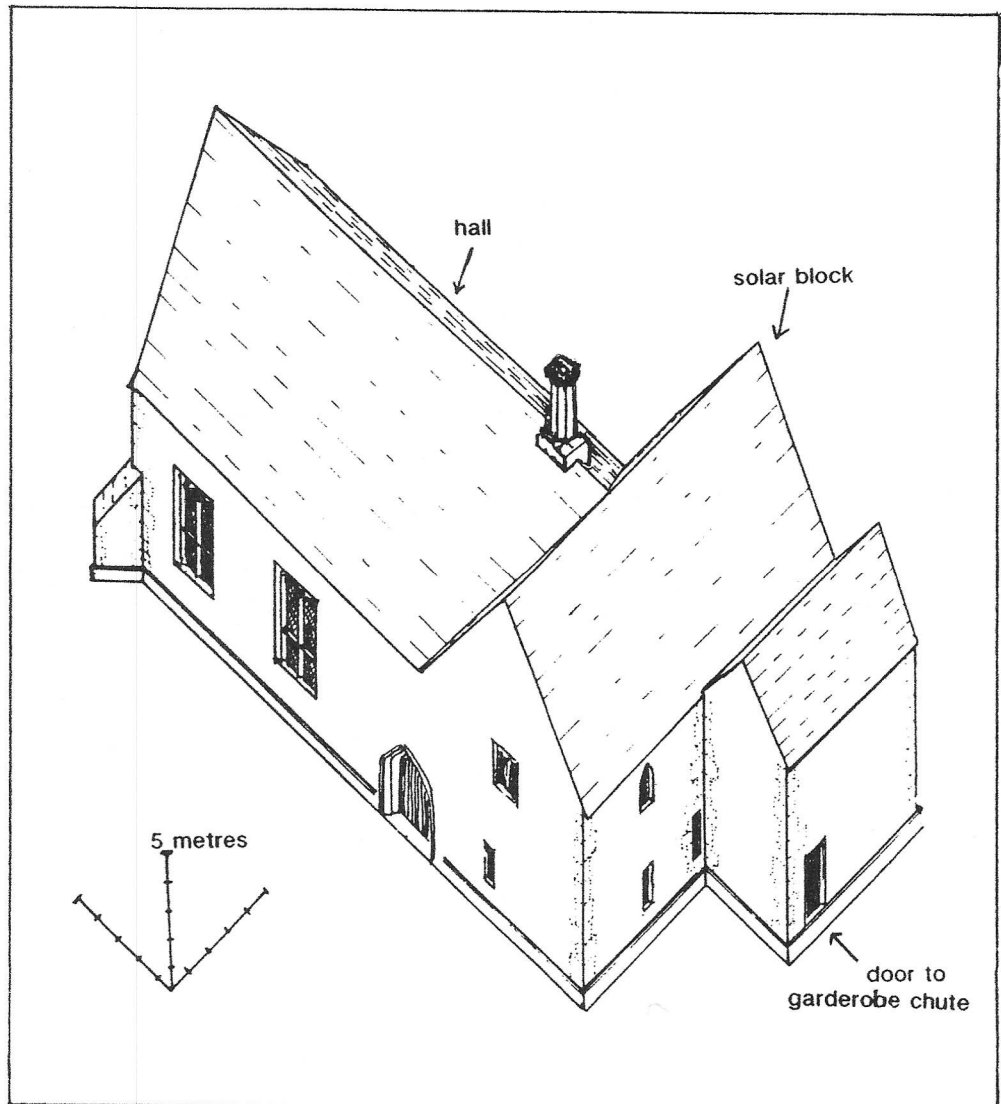
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Illus. 3. William of Wykeham's House: view from the north-west. The seventeenth-century farm house wing and some twentieth-century work have been omitted

the hall, the cross-wing with its chamber over a pantry and buttery, the garderobe, and an oriel. (These are called in the pipe rolls *aula*, *magna camera*, *panetaria*, *butellaria*, *latrina*, and *oriellum*.) All these structures survive except for the oriel which probably joined the high end of the hall to a pre-existing suite of rooms for the bishop.

Half a century after Wykeham rebuilt the hall and northern cross-wing, there was further work during the episcopate of Henry Beaufort. This seems to have involved

great kitchen was a detached structure standing between the hall and the Hyde garden (159305, 159320). The positions of some buildings cannot be ascertained: the chamber and hall of the clerks (159457), the dairy (159357), and the building called '*le cage*' — presumably a small prison (159306; Steane 1985, 27–28).

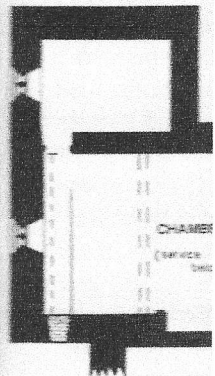
The arrangement of the core buildings of this earlier house seems to foreshadow the plan of Wykeham's house which still stands today. There was a great chamber adjoining the north end of the hall which was probably the room sometimes referred to as 'the solar above the pantry and buttery' (159325). This north chamber was quite separate from the lord's, or bishop's, chamber (159290, 159346) which abutted the hall (159324) but almost certainly at the other end. The bishop's chapel also adjoined the hall (159308), probably immediately to the south, and his chamber adjoined the chapel but on the western corner of the hall (159303). The ground slopes away to the south of the hall and this made it necessary to buttress the lord's chamber (159369). The chapel had a glass window of three '*bays*' (159372) It was reached by steps (159355) which may have been contained within an oriel — *oriolum capelle* (159348), although the meaning of the word oriel has been much debated (see below). The lord's chamber also had a glazed window, or windows, a screen beside the bishop's bed (159304), and a stone chimney (159302). In fact, all the core buildings were at least partly stone-built (159303, 159450A, 159287), a mark of superior status in Hampshire where building stone is scarce.

Thus, both before and after Wykeham's rebuilding, the Court House had many of the features of a large episcopal residence, but it lacked both a range of lodgings to accommodate the complete household and a bakehouse and brewhouse which were necessary to cater for large numbers.

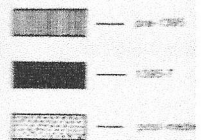
WYKEHAM'S HOUSE

William of Wykeham acquired the see of Winchester in 1367. In spite of a heavy involvement in affairs of state, he embarked upon a remarkable programme of renewal of his residences at Wolvesey Palace in Winchester (Biddle 1986, 18), Bishop's Waltham and Farnham, Surrey (Hare 1988, 231), and at Highclere (Dunlop 1940, 39–47).

Thus Wykeham's building work at East Meon must be viewed as part of a wider enterprise. Essentially, he built the present hall and north chamber block from the ground upwards, replacing an earlier hall and chamber block which had probably stood on the same site. He left the bishop's private suite of rooms at the south end of the hall unaltered, and an examination of the south end of Wykeham's hall clearly shows that it incorporates the wall of an earlier structure. The skewing of this south wall to accommodate an earlier building line, the different composition of the old and new walls, and the vertically straight masonry joints where the string-course ends abruptly, leave no doubt on this point (Illus. 5b). The earlier wall has been much repaired and is now formed mainly with malmstone ashlar blocks. The walls of Wykeham's buildings, on the other hand, are composed of flints, sparsely interspersed with irregular blocks of sandstone and malmstone. Only the quoins, string course and window dressings are of ashlar, and these are mainly sandstone.



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Illus. 5a. Suggested position of the north wall of the hall at the north end of the hall.

The first buildings at East Meon were built of flints and malmstone (i.e. the Court House). The flints lay on the malmstone. The bishopric was rebuilt by Wykeham at Winchester. Shortly after the rebuilding of the Court House...

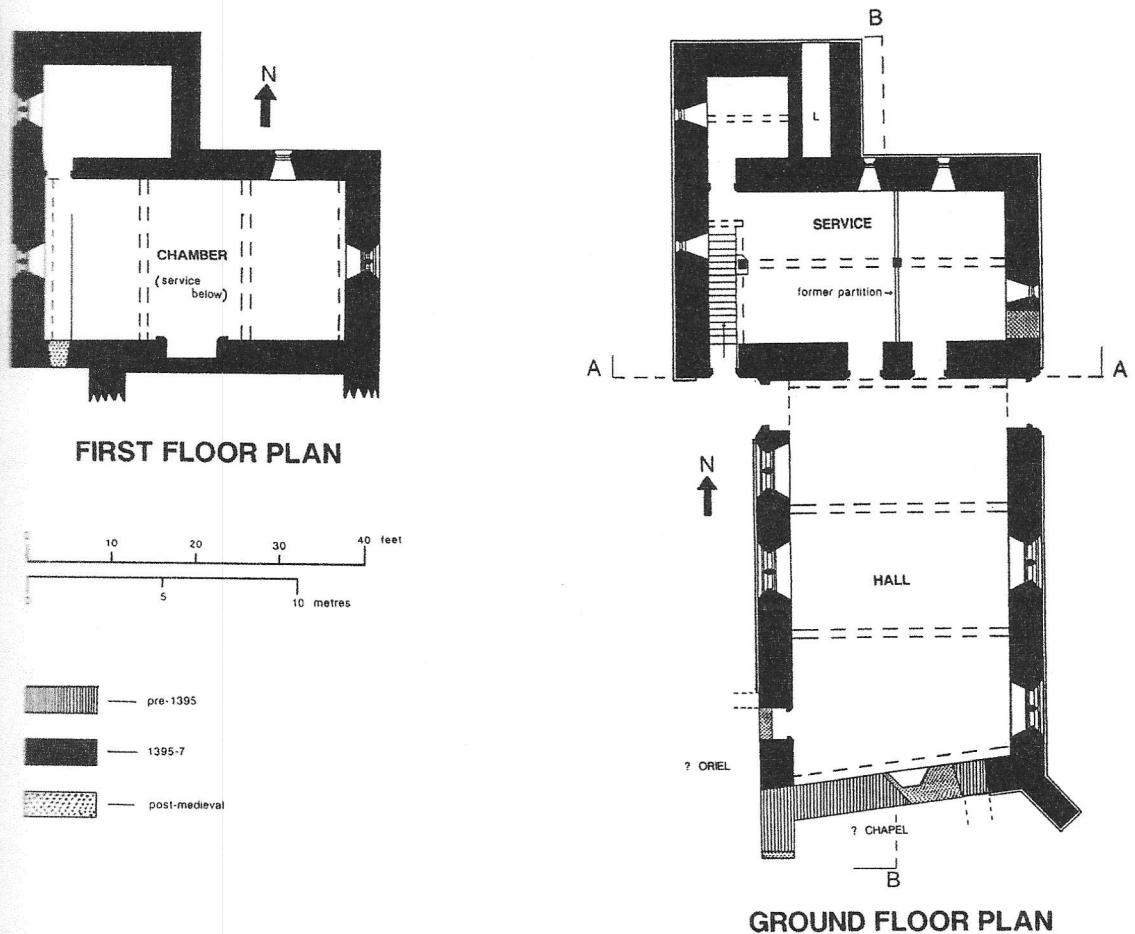
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Illus. 5a. and 5b. William of Wykeham's House: Plans. The ground floor plan shows the suggested positions of the bishop's chapel and of the oriel leading from the hall to his private suite. At the north end is the garderobe block with latrine chute (marked L). The first floor plan shows the great chamber (or solar) and garderobe block

The first indication of Wykeham's intention to rebuild a substantial part of the core buildings at East Meon appears in the pipe roll of 1385/86. In that year, 1085 cartloads of flints were collected from the local fields where they abound and taken to the Rectory (i.e. the Court House) at East Meon for the construction of a new hall (159392). There the flints lay unused for another ten years, during which time the resources of the bishopric were expended in other directions. In this decade, a substantial part of Winchester College was built (Harvey 1965, 108) and a considerable sum was spent on rebuilding at Bishop's Waltham Palace (Hare 1988, 230).

Shortly after Michaelmas in the autumn of 1395, Wykeham's earlier intention to rebuild the Court House began to be realized. The site for the new hall, chamber,

garderobe, and oriel was cleared. Foundations were laid and, in November, had to be covered with straw and mud, as a protection against frost. Freestone for the ashlar dressings of the doors, windows, buttresses, the string-course (called the 'watertable') and for the chimney in the chamber block was quarried at Langrish, Stodham, and *Wykwode* (159402). The first two were local quarries yielding malmstone and Lower Greensand stone (Clifton-Taylor 1962, 126); *Wykwode* may have been the wood in the hamlet of Wyck (some nineteen kilometres (twelve miles) from East Meon) where there are ancient sandstone quarries.

The greater part of the new walling at the Court House was completed within a year and, by Michaelmas 1396, the tilers had laid 35,500 tiles on the roofs of the hall and north cross-wing. Robert Prewys, who had worked for Wykeham at Highclere in the early 1370s (Dunlop 1940, 45) and who was almost certainly the Robert Brewes whose work was frequently recorded at Waltham (Hare 1988, 240), had been contracted to complete all the necessary carpentry. Although much of the timber came from Wykeham's own woods, the considerable sum of £17 13s. 4d. bought timber from the Abbot of Durford whose abbey lay some sixteen kilometres (10 miles) to the east in the Sussex weald.

This purchase must indicate some special timbers which were not readily available on adjacent bishopric estates and it is very probable that they included the four great beams which were carried to East Meon at a cost of 13s. 4d. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that these were the four great tie-beams which still span the hall. Approximately 9.67 m (32 ft) in length, they are easily the largest timbers in Wykeham's building, and no beams approaching this length have been found in domestic buildings of this date in Hampshire below a seignorial level (Lewis *et al.* 1988). It would appear that timbers of such dimensions had to be specially sought from far afield (159402; Munby 1991, 380).

The year 1396/97 saw the virtual completion of the new work at East Meon. Doors and window shutters were made, although there is no reference to glazing windows. Internal partitions were erected between pantry and buttery, between the latrine pit and the rest of the garderobe block, and at the 'dormante' between the hall and chapel (159403). This *dormante* is possibly the great tie beam at the south end of the hall (Salzman 1952, 204) above which is a timber-framed partition, now tile-hung (Illus. 6).

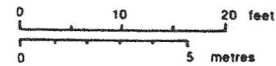
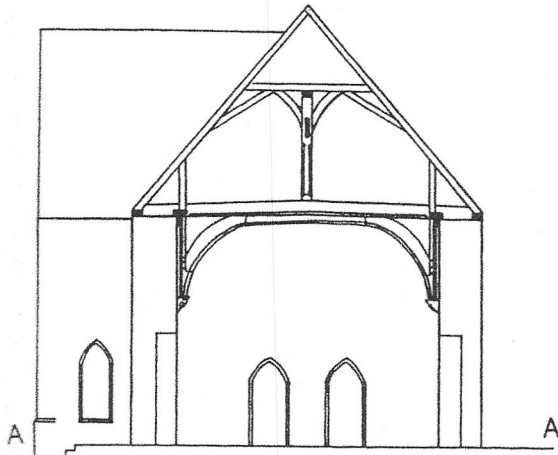
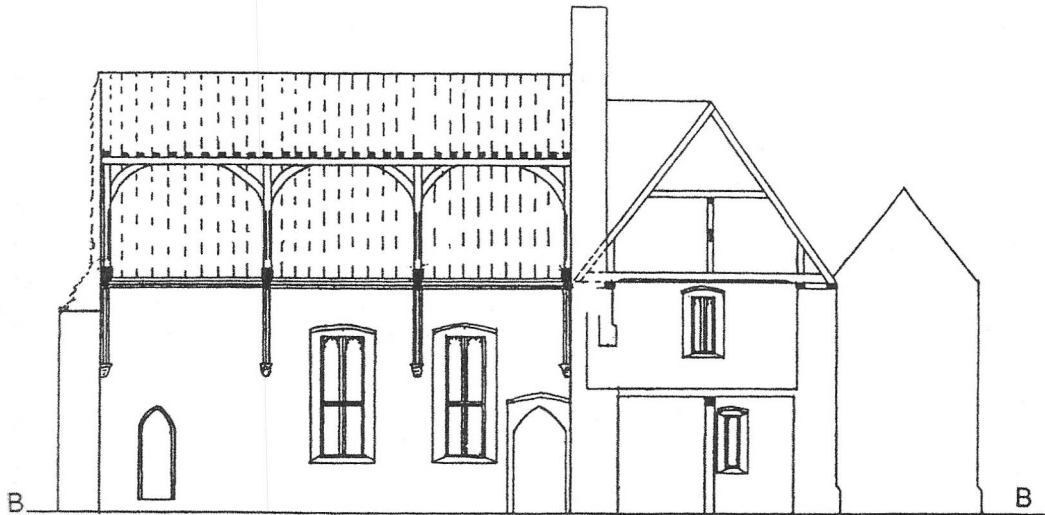
Various other fittings were put in place. Beech boards were sawn for two ordinary benches and for the high bench in the hall which was enclosed at either end against draughts. A chimney was installed in the chamber over the service rooms (the fine chimney-piece still stands), but there was no chimney in the hall for the original rafters are still heavily coated with soot from an open fire.

Eight corbels were fixed in the hall wall, where they still support the braces beneath the great tie beams. Some of these corbels have been rather damaged but it is clear that four of them depict the head of what is probably the same bearded king and the remaining four depict what is probably the same full-faced bishop. The pipe roll clearly states that the corbels were carved by a mason in Winchester on the instruction of William Wynford (159403). The supervision by Wykeham's chief architect and mason is clearly a measure of their importance and strongly suggests that they were meant to be portraits.

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Illus. 6. William of Wykeham's House: Long section (above) through the hall, chamber block and beside the garderobe. Cross section (below) through the hall, showing the outside door to the stairs leading up to the solar

It is tempting, and indeed reasonable, to suppose that the bishops represent Wykeham himself (Illus. 10). Two carved heads at Winchester College, said by tradition to represent Wykeham, offer little assistance, for one is lean-faced (Harvey 1961, 12; Custance 1982, pl. 1), while the other is rounded (Chitty and Pitcher 1932, 9-10). Unfortunately, too, the stained glass portrait of Wykeham in the College chapel is only a nineteenth-century copy of the original (Le Couteur 1920, 70-71). However, Wykeham's effigy on his tomb in Winchester Cathedral does bear a fairly rounded

countenance and is known to have been completed shortly before 1403 when Wykeham was still alive and its accuracy could be confirmed (Harvey 1946, 5; Altham 1954, 2-3). It does bear some resemblance to the corbel head at East Meon, but the likeness is not striking and one can perhaps only return a verdict of 'not proven'.

As for the bearded kings at East Meon, it is again tempting to suppose that they are all portraits of the reigning monarch, Richard II. Richard is portrayed beardless in both a carved stone head and in stained glass at Winchester College dated 1393, but he had begun growing a beard by 1395 and a moustache by 1397 (Harvey 1961, 11-12 and pls. ix, xib). Thus, the corbels at East Meon could be a likeness of the king, although they are rather too full-faced to be convincing portraits (Illus. 11).

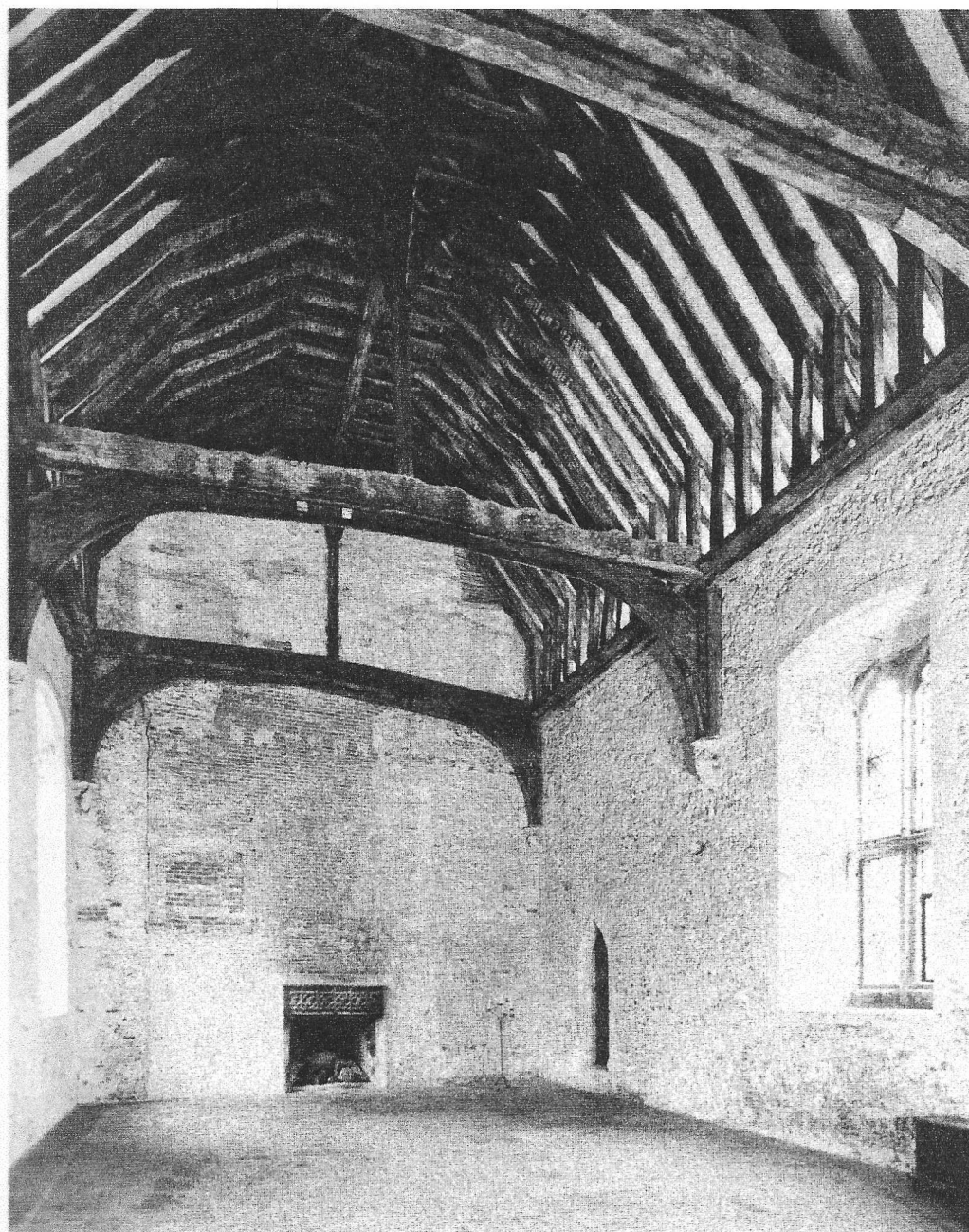
The cost of the new work at East Meon in 1395/96 was £103 6s. 5³/₄d., and in 1396/97 £6 9s. 5¹/₂d. (159402, 159403). The nature of the work and the relatively meagre expenditure recorded in the latter year suggest that the building campaign was coming to an end. Thus, although the pipe roll for 1397/98 has been lost, it is probable that little, if any, new work was carried out in that year. Certainly, no new work was recorded between 1398/99 and 1402/03 (159403A, 159404, 159405, 159406, 159407).

The total recorded expenditure on Wykeham's rebuilding at East Meon was a little over £110; less than a tenth of the money laid out during his episcopate on new work at Bishop's Waltham (Hare 1988, 230). While this is one measure of the relative importance of the Court House, another is the fact that William Wynford stayed several times at East Meon to superintend building as it progressed (159402). The lower cost at East Meon indicates a smaller building but Wynford's supervision of the new work is a mark of its status as a country house befitting the wealthiest see in England.

The carpentry of the Court House is well-made with fine timbers and yet remarkably plain. The crown-post roof above the hall is elegant in form but is simply chamfered without elaborate mouldings (Illus. 7 and 8). The roof above the solar, with its unchamfered crown-posts, and braces to the collar purlin only, is even simpler (Illus. 12). Such simplicity was not, of course, indicative of episcopal poverty or even of the lowly status of East Meon, for the plain finish of timber-work is a regional characteristic, noted even at Bishop's Waltham Palace (Warmington 1988, 246). The stonework, too, is plain and it is likely that this again was by choice rather than necessity, for Wynford favoured clear surfaces and restrained ornament (Wood 1965, 159). This plainness applies even to the monumental fireplace in the solar, where some decoration might have been expected.

It is thus the scale of Wykeham's buildings, rather than their surface ornament, which gives them an air of stately nobility. The hall is approximately 14.03 m (46 ft) high and its internal dimensions are 7.93 m (26 ft) by 14.69 (48 ft); comparable with the great hall at Bishop's Waltham 8.23 m (27 ft) by 20.13 m (66 ft) and the hall of a near-contemporary, lay aristocrat at Minster Lovell, in Oxfordshire 7.93 m (26 ft) by 15.25 m (50 ft) (Wood 1965, 64).

The solar, too, is a fine room whose internal dimensions are 5.48 m (18 ft) by 10.98 m (36 ft). It is reached from an external door by an apparently original, solid-tread stair, and it has access to an inner room, called 'the little chamber within the new chamber' in 1418/19 (159420). This inner room has a latrine chute at one end which is now floored over.



Illus. 7. William of Wykeham's House: The Hall, looking south towards the inserted chimney. On the right is a blocked, side door which formerly led to the oriel, and on the left is a vertical masonry join where Wykeham's building abuts the much-patched wall of an earlier building — probably the bishop's chapel

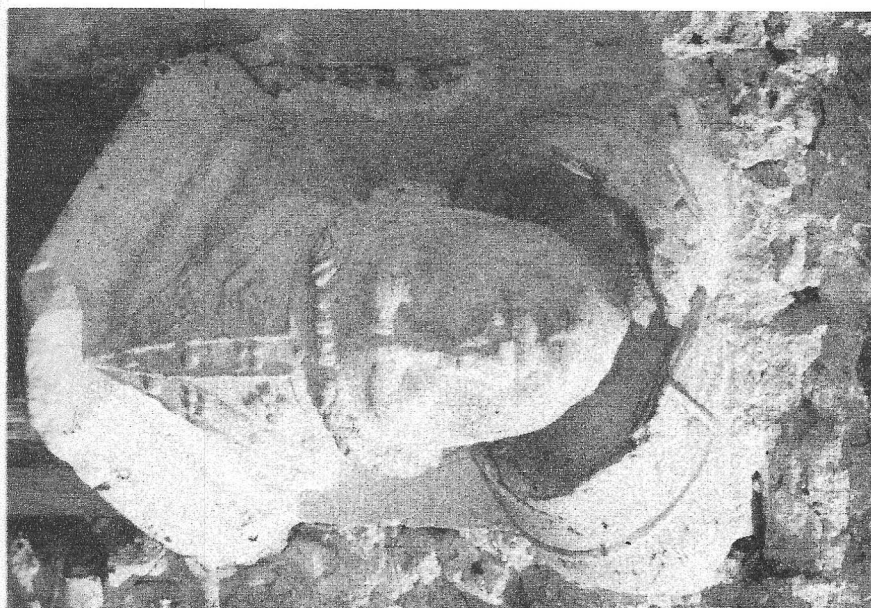
(Photograph: John Crook)



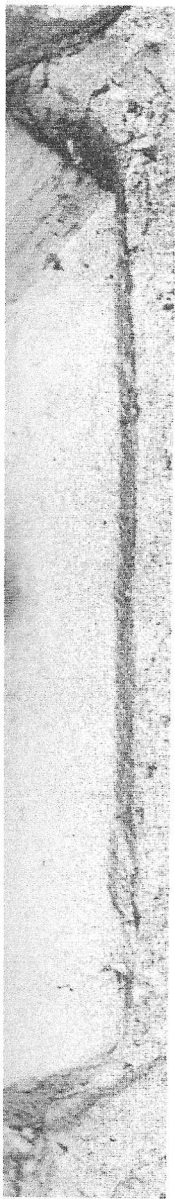
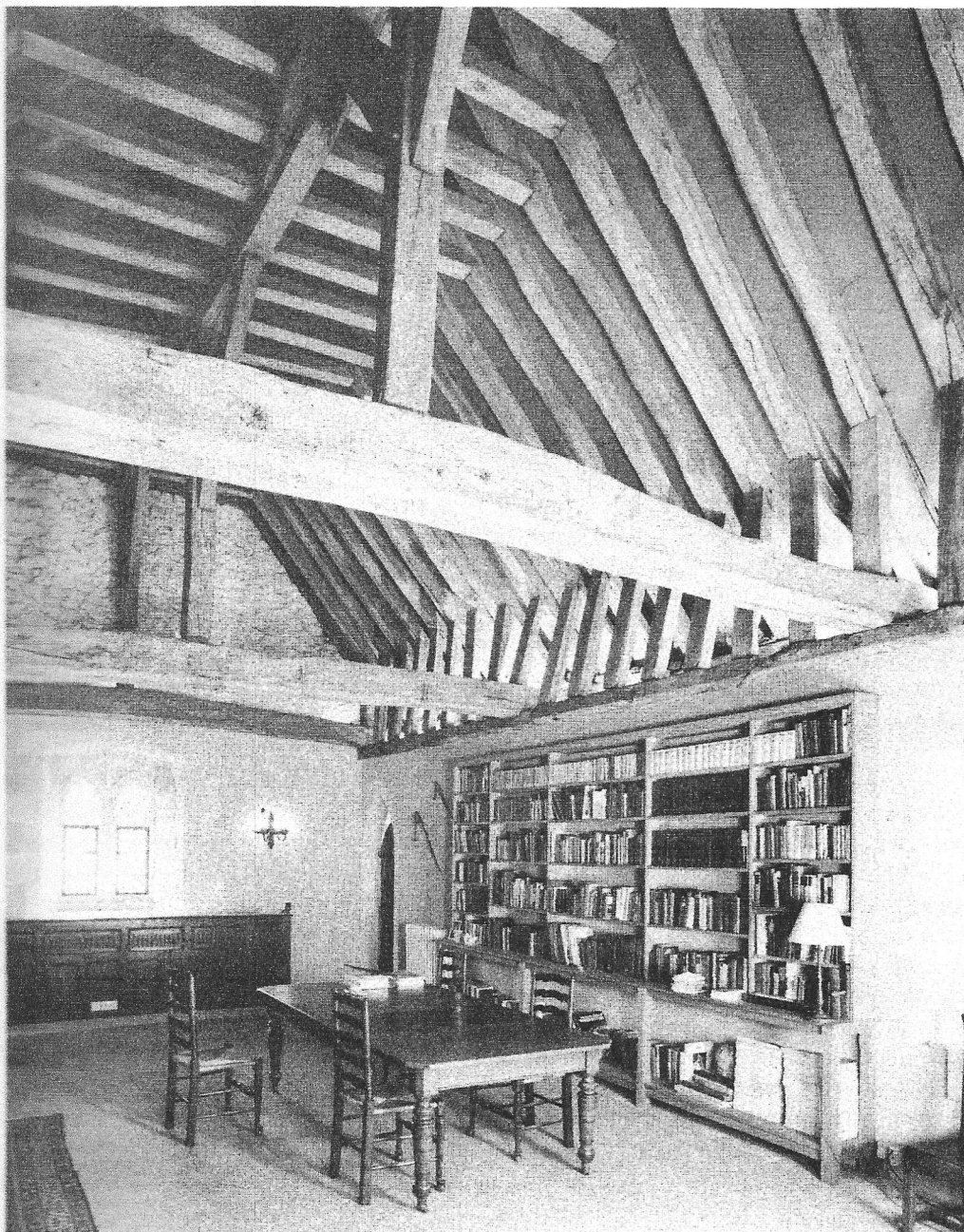
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Illus. 9. William of Wykeham's House: Wykeham's
effigy on his tomb in Winchester Cathedral
(Copyright: Winchester Museums Service)



Illus. 10. William of Wykeham's House: A bishop's
head (possibly Wykeham's) — a stone corbel in the hall
at East Meon
(Photograph: John Crook)



a stone corbel

Illus. 12. William of Wykeham's House: The great chamber or solar, looking west towards the door to the garderobe block in the right-hand corner

(*Photograph: John Crook*)

The intended function of this solar is unclear. In 1398/99 it was called the 'new' chamber and distinguished from the lord's chamber (159403A), and in 1435/36 it was called 'the great chamber at the end of the hall' to distinguish it from the lord's chamber next to the chapel (159434). In 1440/41, the terms 'great chamber' and 'the lord's great chamber' (159436) seem to have been used interchangeably — implying both that it was the largest chamber within the *curia* and that its prime function was to accommodate the bishop.

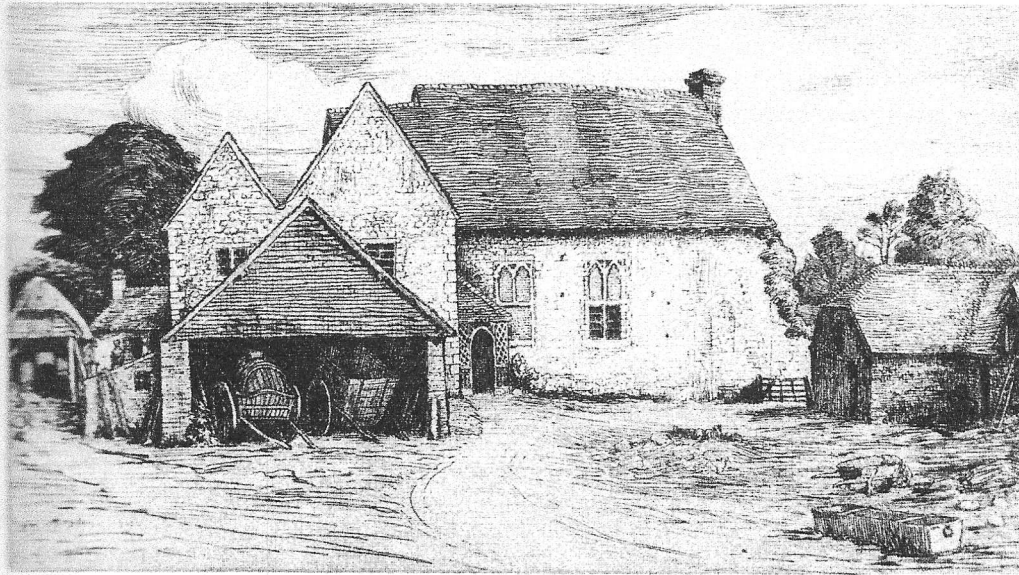
Such evidence argues against Margaret Wood's presumption that the great chamber at East Meon was primarily intended as lodgings for the bishop's steward, or some other senior member of his staff (Wood 1965, 137) and favours the view that a great churchman in the late Middle Ages would commonly require both a great chamber for his state apartments and a separate set of living-rooms for his private use (Evans 1949, 114). This does not, of course, rule out the probability that the great chamber would be made available to the steward and other notables on occasions when the bishop had no use for it.

At the high end of the hall, is a blocked doorway (Illus. 7 and 13). Outside, a vertical mark in the masonry shows where a demolished wall abutted on to the hall at a right angle. It is clear that the string-course which runs along the wall of the hall, and which now stops abruptly at the vertical mark, formerly continued along the demolished building and was thus probably coeval with it. As the oriel is the only one of Wykeham's buildings not to have survived, the inescapable conclusion is that this demolished projection was indeed the oriel. Although the term 'oriel' has a complex history and various meanings (Wood 1965, ch. 7), in the fourteenth century it came to denote a little projecting room off the dais end of the hall giving convenient access to a chamber block (ibid. 103–04). At East Meon, the oriel seems to have fulfilled this purpose precisely, built as it was in the angle between the hall and the lord's private suite; exactly its position at, for example, Ashleworth Court (Glos.) and Tickenham Court in Somerset (ibid. pls. xviii and xixb).

Wykeham's new hall, cross-wing, garderobe, and oriel were probably completed by 1397. Thus, of the core buildings at East Meon, there were still the bishop's chamber and chapel to be rebuilt. Wykeham, then an elderly man, may not have cared to trouble himself with new work on this episcopal suite. Neither the pipe rolls nor the bishop's register for his episcopate (R. Wykeham ii, 621–29) give any indication that he ever visited the Court House and thus the rooms set aside for the bishop's private use may have been of minor interest to him. On the other hand, if the corbel heads in the hall really were meant to portray Wykeham and Richard II, it is possible that the rebuilding at East Meon may have been connected with an intention on Wykeham's part to entertain the king there. Such an intention would have been thwarted by Richard's deposition in 1399.

HENRY BEAUFORT'S HOUSE

Wykeham was succeeded by Henry Beaufort (1407–47) who began the first of three building campaigns at Waltham as early as 1406 (Hare 1988, 232). In contrast, East Meon may have been neglected and by 1425/26 the new great chamber had fallen into



illus. 13. William of Wykeham's House: An etching of the west side of the Court House in 1905. The blocked doorway from the hall to the demolished oriel is visible on the right near what appear to be the ivy-covered ruins of part of the south wing

(Photograph: Stan Smith)

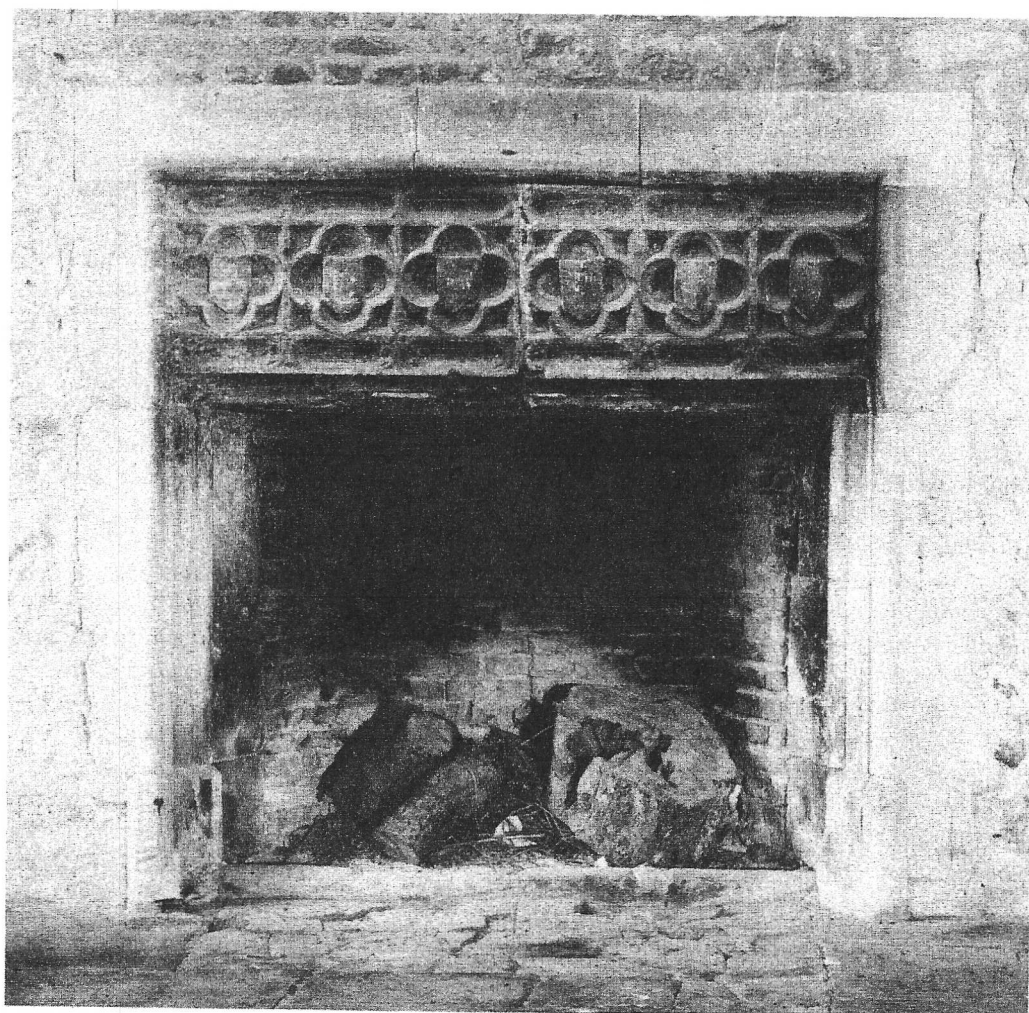
disrepair. Its north wall was so dilapidated that new stone had to be fetched from Langrish to replace the old, and the timberwork was so rotten that floor joists and wall plates, called 'somers', had to be renewed (159427).

Beaufort's first recorded visit to the Court House was in 1433/34 and this may have prompted a decision to begin a new building campaign (159432). Unfortunately, the pipe rolls are incomplete and the exact nature of the work is not entirely clear. We cannot even be sure whether work began in 1436/37 or 1437/38, for the pipe rolls for these years have been lost. However, the manorial account for the latter year survives, describing preparations to receive the bishop and Richard Carpenter's preparatory work on a timber-framed gatehouse, measuring 15.85 m (52 ft) by 5.38 m (17 ft 7 in.) with a chamber over the gate (159493 7/7). This was probably the gatehouse with three rooms in it which was still standing in 1649 (155645). The purpose of these rooms is not stated in the pipe rolls, but they may have been furnished with the thirteen bedsteads made in 1440/41 when Beaufort stayed at the Court House again (159436). If so, they may have been intended for Beaufort's servants, reflecting the general improvement in the standard of lodgings in great households at this time. However, this new work is not comparable in scale with Beaufort's fine range of lodgings at Bishop's Waltham where a much larger household could be accommodated (Warmington 1988).

In 1438/39, a 'new building' — probably the gatehouse — was completed by Richard Carpenter. Work was also begun on a stone building with walls 3.97 m (13 ft) high and 49.10 m (161 ft) in length. It is probable that some of these walls were internal ones, but this still represents a considerable building whose function is not specified, although a

clue as to its whereabouts may be the renewal of a buttress at the south end of the hall (159435).

Tantalizingly, the pipe roll for 1439/40 is lost, so that some of the entries in the roll for 1440/41 are obscure. However, it is clear that an expensive rebuilding was in progress, using a good deal of better quality stone; for example Beerstone bought from the Prior of Southwick and stone brought from St Cross near Winchester where work was commencing on Beaufort's range of almshouses (159436; Hare 1991, 30). It seems likely that some of the new stonework at East Meon was connected with a remodelling



Illus. 14. William of Wykeham's House: A chimney piece which was found on site and inserted into the south wall of the hall *c.* 1930. This possibly dates from Beaufort's work on the bishop's private suite in the mid-fifteenth century

(Photograph: John Crook)

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 1491, 30). It seems
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or even rebuilding of the bishop's private suite at the south end of the hall. Certainly, partitions were made within the lord's chambers with wainscot brought from Winchester, the chapel door and altar were remade, and the cellar (perhaps the one beneath the lord's chamber) was equipped to receive wine (159436). Significantly, the pipe roll for the following year, 1441/42, refers to the filling of scaffold holes in the walls of the lord's chamber (159437).

Two other pieces of evidence are worth noting. During refurbishment of the house and gardens in about 1930, a fine chimney-piece, decorated with six quatrefoils and shields was discovered (Horder 1932, 69; *Illus.* 14). This could well be of mid-fifteenth-century date and it is tempting to suppose that it came originally from Beaufort's work in the now demolished private episcopal suite. A similar view could be taken of a fine, stone chimney, now in the garden at the Court House. It has an octagonal shaft beneath battlemented mouldings and could comfortably date from the mid-fifteenth century.

The work of 1440/41 included a considerable refurbishment of Wykeham's buildings. The masonry of the four hall windows and of two windows in the great chamber was renewed. All these windows were glazed, apparently for the first time, with glass bought at Guildford (Surrey), and William Peyntor of Winchester was hired to paint the tie-beams and wall plates of the lord's great chamber in a green colour. Thus the Court House was made ready for Beaufort's visit that year (159436). Incomplete documentation shows that at least £115 had been spent, making the house fit for episcopal visits; a considerable sum but hardly comparable with the £830 spent on new building at Bishop's Waltham during the same period (Hare 1988, 235).

Beaufort died in 1447. His successor, William of Waynflete (1447–86), showed an initial interest in East Meon. He visited in 1451/52 (159442) and again in 1452/53 (159443). In 1460/61, Reginald Uvedale, gentleman, visited East Meon on two occasions, apparently to settle a dispute between the bishop and his tenants (155829) and in the following year the bishop himself came (155830). This may have been the occasion on which Waynflete is reputed to have been seized by hostile villagers and narrowly escaped with his life (V.C.H. Hants iii, 65). However this may be, no further episcopal visits to East Meon are recorded in the pipe rolls for the remainder of the fifteenth century, although the Court House continued to be kept in good repair.

THE STATUS AND FUNCTION OF THE COURT HOUSE

What was the purpose of a house at East Meon for the late medieval bishops of Winchester? Certainly the purpose was rather less obvious than was the case with many of their other residences. The episcopal palaces at Wolvesey and Southwark (Surrey) provided indispensable bases in Winchester and London from which diocesan or national affairs could be administered. A string of residences in between — Bishop's Sutton, Farnham (Surrey), and Esher (Surrey) — were important staging posts on journeys between Winchester and the capital. Other residences, like the palace at Bishop's Waltham, were favoured country retreats and were so commodious that the bishop and his entire household could stay there for months at a time (Hare 1988, 232; R. Wykeham ii, 628).



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East Meon, however, was not built on this scale and neither the pipe rolls nor the bishops' registers suggest that episcopal visits lasted longer than a few days. Nor is it likely to have been an essential staging post between Winchester in the west and Sussex or Kent to the east for there were no bishopric estates or diocesan responsibilities in those counties and episcopal journeys to Canterbury took other routes. Nor is a claim that it was a useful stage between Farnham and the coast borne out by episcopal itineraries (R. Woodlock i, xv–xxvii). It was not even an essential outpost far from other bishopric residences, for the bishop's house at Hambledon was of comparable size and less than five miles away (Roberts 1993b, 21).

If East Meon was not a first-ranking bishopric palace, it certainly must not be supposed that it was typical of the demesne farmhouses to be found on almost every episcopal estate in Hampshire. These were small timber-framed houses with a few rooms for the farm bailiff. One such bailiff's house on the manor of Wield near Bishop's Sutton was completely rebuilt in 1361/62. It consisted of a timber-framed hall with two chambers and a stable. The whole building, which cost less than £5, was certainly not one in which a medieval bishop would ever have expected to stay (159372). Indeed, the houses of lesser men in the Winchester area seem to have been exclusively timber-framed (Lewis *et al.* 1988), and even Winchester College's great inn at Andover was built of timber in the 1440s (Roberts 1992, 153–70). By contrast, in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Hampshire, buildings of stone or brick were closely associated with seignorial residences. This is true, for example of the mansion houses in Hampshire of the prior of St Swithun's, all of which were stone- or brick-built (Roberts 1993a, 107).

Thus the Court House was a good deal more than a manorial farmhouse and yet somewhat less than a first ranking palace. While its purpose is somewhat enigmatic, it is possible to make some plausible suggestions. To begin with, it provided accommodation for the steward who was a man of some standing and who generally came twice-yearly to preside at manorial courts. Moreover, the pre-Wykeham house served as a base for important episcopal servants, like Sir John de Edyngton who stayed at East Meon on three occasions in 1361/62 in order to catch fallow deer and to despatch the venison to the bishop's household at Farnham (Surrey) and Highclere (159372). It could also be made available to influential friends and associates of the bishops who might need it as a stopping-place on their travels. The Abbot of Beaulieu stayed there for one night in 1219/20 (159276) and Peter des Rivaux, son of Bishop Peter des Roches and later the royal treasurer, stayed in 1225/26 (159280; Clanchy 1983, 184). Although such visits are rarely recorded in the pipe rolls after Wykeham's rebuilding, this may simply mean that they were being recorded in household accounts which have been lost.

How far was the Court House intended as a residence for the bishops themselves? It is hard to tell how often they stayed at the Court House, although their visits were generally brief (Table 1). At least six occasions have been found in thirteenth-century pipe rolls (Hall 1903, 46; 159271, 159274, 159282, 159294, 159302) and six in the fourteenth century (159321, 159325, 159332, 159356, 159362, 159364). The six recorded visits in the fifteenth century have already been discussed.

It is quite certain that these numbers do not represent the full picture. The pipe rolls only record repair work undertaken in preparation for episcopal visits. When such

work was unnecessary, the expense of such a visit would sometimes — perhaps generally — be recorded in household accounts which have almost all been lost (Roberts 1988, 71). Likewise, the bishops' registers only record episcopal visits when

Table 1

Episcopal Residences etc.	John of Pontoise (1282-1304)	Henry Woodlock (1305-1316)	John de Sandale (1316-1319)	William Edington (1346-1366)	William of Wykeham (1367-1404)
Bishop's Sutton	15 (2.8%)	17 (1.6%)	1 (0.4%)	8 (1.0%)	3 (0.1%)
Bishop's Waltham	12 (2.2%)	37 (3.6%)	6 (2.3%)	77 (9.5%)	352 (16.3%)
Bitterne	15 (2.8%)	44 (4.6%)	2 (0.8%)	4 (0.5%)	0 (0.0%)
East Meon	1 (0.2%)	18 (1.7%)	2 (0.8%)	1 (0.1%)	0 (0.0%)
Fareham	28 (5.2%)	20 (1.9%)	2 (0.8%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Hambleton	1 (0.2%)	1 (0.1%)	4 (1.5%)	2 (0.2%)	0 (0.0%)
Highclere	2 (0.4%)	104 (10.0%)	3 (1.1%)	59 (7.3%)	150 (6.9%)
Marwell	14 (2.6%)	216 (20.9%)	4 (1.5%)	13 (1.6%)	55 (2.5%)
Merdon (Hursley)	5 (0.9%)	10 (1.0%)	1 (0.4%)	12 (1.5%)	3 (0.1%)
Overton	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (0.4%)	1 (0.0%)
Wolvesey (Winchester)	144 (26.7%)	17 (1.6%)	5 (1.9%)	25 (3.1%)	120 (5.6%)
Other Hampshire	14 (2.6%)	22 (2.1%)	6 (2.3%)	5 (0.6%)	10 (0.5%)
Outside Hampshire	292 (53.7%)	529 (51.0%)	225 (86.2%)	604 (74.0%)	1468 (67.9%)
TOTAL TRANSACTIONS	543	1035	261	813	2162

The number of occasions on which bishops of Winchester transacted business at bishopric residences in Hampshire, at non-bishopric residences in Hampshire, or at any residence outside Hampshire. (Based on published bishops' registers — see bibliography.)

On this evidence, the bishops spent more than half their episcopates outside Hampshire. This reflects both the geographical spread of episcopal interests and the bishops' concerns as great statesmen.

Some major residences could accommodate the bishop for long periods, although individual bishops might choose to neglect them. John of Pontoise favoured Wolvesey which, relatively speaking, was ignored by Henry Woodlock who much preferred his birthplace at Marwell (Carpenter Turner 1978, 13). Wykeham greatly preferred Bishop's Waltham, near his own birthplace at Wickham.

Minor residences, such as East Meon, were visited only occasionally. On the evidence of the registers, John of Pontoise failed to visit only one of his Hampshire residences, whereas Wykeham failed to visit four. (One of which was East Meon). The suggestion that this indicates a long-term trend towards the use of fewer residences should be set against the evidence presented in the main body of this paper that bishops continued to visit East Meon for over half a century after Wykeham's death.

diocesan business was transacted at East Meon. Even so, the registers record a few visits during most episcopates and these are quite often additional to those noted in the pipe rolls (R. Pontissara, 287; R. Woodlock i, xx; R. Edington i, xxv).

Given that there were larger episcopal residences relatively close by, why should a bishop visit East Meon at all? As the centre of a manor of about 19,000 acres, he may have felt it necessary to stay from time to time — if only fleetingly — in order to meet men of influence in the neighbourhood and to signal his position as feudal lord. Furthermore he had pastoral duties to fulfil, such as the ordination of local clergy (R. Woodlock ii, 836).

A further reason for a bishop to visit East Meon, especially in the early Middle Ages, might have been the need to consume on site some of the produce of this huge estate. However, if this had been an important consideration, one would have expected the incidence of visits to East Meon to have declined in the later Middle Ages as the growth of a market economy allowed formerly peripatetic bishops to stay at one palace and buy in all their requirements (Miller and Hatcher 1978, 200–01). However, the even distribution of visits during the three centuries so far considered does little to support this view, and yearly expenditure on minor repairs during the whole period shows that there was never a time when it fell into disuse. Indeed, the continuity of use over three centuries is remarkable when compared with the speed with which royal palaces came in and out of favour during the same period (James 1990, 164).

Perhaps the most plausible, primary reason for episcopal visits is that the Court House was a pleasant rural retreat where, with a small 'riding household', the bishop could entertain chosen companions. For those bishops who enjoyed the pleasures of hawking and hunting would not have overlooked the attractions of East Meon park nor of Hambledon park and chase nearby. Mews for goshawks were made at East Meon in 1248/49 and Richard the goshawk-trainer was there in 1251/52 (Roberts 1988, 67, 72, 82). It is certain that some bishops hunted, for Henry Beaufort received a gift of bows and arrows when he visited Winchester College in 1415 specifically for his use when he went hunting in his parks in Hampshire (Kirby 1892, 177). Viewed in this light, we may see the Court House not as inferior to the great residences which could accommodate the entire household but rather as an equal and essential complement to them; as a place where a luxurious but more intimate lifestyle could be enjoyed away from the pressing responsibilities of office.

THE POST-MEDIEVAL COURT HOUSE

A detailed account of the post-medieval history is beyond the scope of this study. The manor was being leased in 1581 and it is unlikely that it served as an episcopal residence after this date (V.C.H. Hants. iii, 65). In the early seventeenth century, a timber-framed farmhouse wing was built against the east wall of Wykeham's hall. Some of the roof timbers in this farmhouse are re-used and soot-blackened, but structurally there is no reason to suppose that it was a medieval kitchen, as has been claimed elsewhere (Faulkner 1967, 190).

A manorial survey of 1647 contains the following interesting description of the house which cannot be related with certainty to the medieval evidence on all points:

The Mannor howse called the Court house beeing strongly built with stone haveinge a large hall, a large Parlor, a Dinging roome, a Kitchen, a Buttery, a Larder, a dayhowse, a kill [kiln], three lodging Chambers, a Corne Chamber, a Cheese Chamber with some other little roomes. Before the entrance of the house is a gatehowse with three rooms thereunto belonging. The roof of the howse is much out of repayer. The scite consisting of two little gardens & one hopyard, & two little Courts west beefore the howse, lyinge altogether betweene the streete of Eastmeon on the west & a feild called the berry garden on the East, neareunto the same on the Northwest is the Church & on the north is a highway called hide Lane & on the South is a peece of ground called dove garden & conteininge together one acre (155645).

In 1908, the roof was still much out of repair. The framework of a screen in the hall, with a central and two side openings, was still in position and the pantry and buttery were still separated by a wooden partition. The bonding of the walls for a destroyed cross-wing south of the hall was noted. The gatehouse and two little courts recorded in 1647 had given way to farm buildings 'of no architectural interest' (V.C.H. Hants. iii, 66). However, their arrangement around a courtyard may reflect a medieval plan (illus. 13).

About 1930, Mr Morley Horder carried out a necessary and sensitive restoration of the Court House. He carefully restored some window heads and fixed into the south wall of the hall a fifteenth-century chimney-piece which he had found somewhere on site. He removed the partition between pantry and buttery and the hall screen which he regarded as inferior, secondary work (Horder 1932, 68; Oswald 1937, 510). He apparently inserted a small window in the south wall of the solar and two doorways in the east wall of the solar block.

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at the Hampshire Record Office allows searchers to find the traditional numbers. Only those pipe rolls quoted in the text are listed below.

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