

CHAPTER 8: The Manor in Context

By Tim Allen with contributions from John Blair

INTRODUCTION

The limited extent of the excavations, and the character of the deposits, many of which are dumps or are exposed courtyard surfaces, makes it impossible to address many of the questions that could be asked of a site such as this. It is not possible to establish the overall development of the manorial buildings, the artefactual evidence for the whole site or the economy of the site overall. Even the chronology of the excavated parts is to some extent uncertain. The following discussion will therefore simply explore selected aspects of the site, and does not claim to be comprehensive.

THE SITING OF THE MANOR

Documentary evidence shows that there was a manor at Witney before the Norman conquest, but the location of the manorial centre, and that of the attached vill, remains unclear. The paucity of late Saxon evidence from the excavations makes it unlikely that the manorial centre lies under the Mount House. Corn Street and Crown Lane, which lead to the ford at Cogges, may well originate in the Saxon period; Rowley and Steiner (1996, 1–4) summarised the history and ownership of the manor of Cogges, which was already in existence before Domesday, and argued that the early Norman earthwork east of the Windrush that marks the site of the castle by the river was strategically placed to control the pre-existing ford. The line of Corn Street and Crown Lane also marks the highest ground on the limestone island, and is thus a likely choice for an early church (cf. Giles 1852, 31–2).

There are references in the Winchester account rolls for 1232/3 to several mills on the river east of the manor, and in the rolls for 1317/18 and 1324/5 to Waley's Mill and to 'Aldeford' adjacent (Hants RO, 11 M59/B1/73 m.12; Hants RO, M59/B1/78 m.17d–18d). This may indicate that there was a second river crossing at the end of Farm Mill Lane in the early medieval (or even the late Saxon) period. A ford in this position would have been well-placed to give access to the narrow belt of land between the arms of the Windrush to the south, which formed part of the late Saxon estate (Fig. 1.3).

Chris Day has commented that Corn Street approaches Witney running south-east, and then kinks eastwards towards Cogges, and has suggested that prior to the laying out of the triangular green the line of Corn Street may have continued south east to Farm Mill Lane. He suggests that the vill may have been focussed upon the area between these two routes (Fig. 1.3). He further suggests that the ford at

the end of Farm Mill Lane led to Abingdon Lane, a route leading to the Thames crossing at Bablock Hythe. By the time that the Witney account rolls begin in 1208, an annual payment to the ferryman at Bablock Hythe is already established, presumably indicating the importance of this route. This payment continues throughout the medieval period (Winch. P.R. 1208–9, ed. Hall, 18; 1210–11, ed. Holt, 66; Winch. P.R. 1537–8, Hants PRO 11M59/B1/246).

The siting of the Norman manor of the bishops of Winchester at Mount House may therefore have been of strategic importance next to a second river crossing, mirroring Cogges Castle on the east bank of the Windrush next to the ford further upstream. This may also have been relevant in siting the tower at the south-east corner of the curia, overlooking the river. Given the existence of a late Saxon settlement at Cogges, rather than opposite the Mount House, it is possible that the siting of the Norman manor house was intended to promote the use of an alternative crossing. If so, however, this appears no longer to have been significant by the time the triangular market place was laid out (see also below), and was overtaken by the building of the bridge at the north end of town, probably in the early 13th century.

THE BUILDING OF THE STONE HOUSE

There were probably many reasons for constructing a stone manor house at Witney in the early 12th century. Stone ecclesiastical residences were erected at Norwich between 1107 and 1119, and by Roger of Salisbury from 1115 onwards; Roger's nephew, Bishop Alexander of Lincoln, built a manor surrounded by a stone curtain wall at Banbury in Oxfordshire between 1124 and 1135 (Fasham 1973, 315). According to Biddle (1976, 324), Bishop William Giffard had built the West Hall at Wolvesey in *c.* 1110. Witney was one of the largest Winchester estates; there were other Winchester manors at Adderbury in North Oxfordshire and at Brightwell near Harwell in Berkshire, but Witney was closer than Adderbury to Oxford, and closer than Brightwell to Woodstock, where Henry I established a park and hunting-lodge before 1110 (Stevenson 1977, 7), and where he kept a menagerie. Witney also had the advantage of proximity to Wychwood Forest for hunting (Blair 1994, 179).

Attendance on the king when at Woodstock and Oxford would have made a suitable residence at Witney politically valuable to the bishop, although Henry I is only known to have visited Oxford rarely, in 1114, 1122 and once between 1123 and 1133 (Cooper 1979, 10). In 1133, however, he stayed at his

'new hall' at Beaumont just outside the city walls (Stevenson 1977, 7), and thereafter royal visits to Oxford become more frequent (see Witney in the Anarchy below). Bishop Henry of Blois was at Woodstock at some time between May and August in 1133.

While the building of a stone manor house at Witney was therefore part of the general development of ecclesiastical residences at this time, it is among the earliest and (on present evidence) the most substantial of these. The comparative plans illustrated on Figs 7.1 and 7.2, which are largely of French royal palaces and English diocesan centres, only serve to emphasise how extraordinary the Period 3 complex was. As the date of these buildings within the first half of the 12th century is not clear, we cannot establish whether their construction was in emulation of the building work at Beaumont and on the ecclesiastical complex at Banbury, or perhaps stimulated their construction in response. The royal interest in Woodstock, however, was almost certainly a major reason for the unusual scale of building at the outlying manor at Witney.

The solar tower by John Blair

The common use of solar towers on bishops' palaces has been discussed in Chapter 7. Solar towers are ambiguous in their ancestry and purpose. As is illustrated by Minster Court, where a rectangular tower forms both the west end of the church and the south-west angle of a quadrangular monastic grange, there is a spectrum of forms and functions running from big church towers or tower-naves via tower-lodgings and *maisons-fortes* to keeps (Renn 1994; McAleer 1998). Within this spectrum lie 12th- and 13th-century 'solar towers' such as those at Chilham, Greenhythe and Old Soar (all Kent) (Clapham 1928; Gravett & Renn 1981; Wood 1950, 36–8). As a purely secular structure, the Mount House solar tower fits readily into this last 'family'. It is very likely, however, that when used in bishops' palaces, as also at the west ends of important churches on episcopal manors (Heywood 1982; McAleer 1998), these keep-like towers had a symbolic role, proclaiming the owner's secular power in a tradition ultimately derived from the *Westwerks* of great Ottonian churches. That this tradition was still active in Early Norman England is clear from Canterbury, where evidence has recently indicated that the north-west tower of the cathedral should be considered an integral part of the adjoining palace (Tatton-Brown in Rady *et al.* 1991, 4).

The hall

Blair (1993) has recently argued that the surviving two-storey stone ranges of the 12th and 13th century in Britain, many of which have been interpreted as first-floor halls, were in fact chamber-blocks, the *camera* of the standard medieval formula *camera et aula*, and were accompanied by detached ground-floor halls. Applying this model to the ecclesiastical

fortified houses of the mid 12th century, he interprets the ranges adjoining the towers at Sherborne and Old Sarum as halls, with chambers in the opposite blocks. He reinterprets the 'West Hall' at Wolvesey as the main chamber block at first-floor level, with a tower at the south-west corner (Blair 1993, 10–11), and the East Hall at Lincoln as a chamber-block (Chapman *et al.* 1975; Blair 1993, 11).

Blair's reassessment of these first-floor halls, however, leaves sites such as Wolvesey and Lincoln with chamber blocks considerably earlier than the accompanying stone halls. It is clear from documentary evidence that Bishop Losinga planned a ground floor hall to accompany his tower, range and chapel (all built by 1119), but this was not completed until the mid 12th century by Bishop Turbe. It may have been normal to build a stone chamber-block and chapel before a stone hall, but unless (as Blair postulates) there were earlier timber halls as yet unlocated on these sites, the bishops in question would have been without a hall for 20 to 40 years. The argument is further complicated by the presence of earlier residences on both of these sites, parts of which may have continued in use during this interim period.

In contrast, Thompson (1998, 29–35 and 125) argues that the bishops' palaces of the late 11th and early 12th century were based upon a continental Ottonian model, in which the functions of hall and chamber (divided by a partition wall) were combined in a single building at first floor level. He, therefore, sees the West Hall at Wolvesey and the East Hall at Lincoln as containing both hall and chamber. Thompson argues further that ground-floor aisled halls were a 'native' Saxon type which were later adopted by the Norman aristocracy, reappearing in stone in the later 12th century. At this time, he suggests, the earlier hall and chamber-blocks were retained purely as domestic accommodation, and he cites Malmesbury as an example (Thompson 1998, 125–6), though this has now been cast into doubt (Palliser, 1999).

The continental evidence suggests that both models were in use at the same time, as indeed Gardelles said in 1976 (Gardelles 1976, 129). For instance in Normandy ground-floor halls were present and first-floor chamber blocks were common (Impey 1993, 82–120), while complexes like the comital palaces at Troyes and Provins appear to be integrated blocks incorporating hall, chamber and chapel (Renoux 1996, 32, Fig. 13). At the Mount House the evidence is inconclusive. The East Range may have been a first floor chamber with undercroft, the tower being the bishop's private apartments and the hall elsewhere, or range and tower could have been an integrated hall and chamber block.

As Blair's analysis in Chapter 6 shows, an *aula* (hall) was in existence by the time that documentary records begin, as it was repaired in 1211. In 1244–46 major work was carried out, involving covering half-built walls over winter, and this clearly refers to an aisled building in stone (Chapter 6). Either rebuilding or significant extension is implied by the scale of the work. A great chimney is mentioned in 1225 and

again in 1245/6, and a *louvre* in 1317/18. A ground floor aisled hall would certainly not have had a wall fireplace when first built, perhaps arguing for a considerably earlier date for this building, and thus a 12th century hall. On the other hand, it seems odd that both an open hearth and a wall fireplace should be present in the same building. It is therefore possible that the references to *aula* refer to more than one building, one of which was not an open ground floor hall. By 1335 the account rolls also mention a bailiff's hall, and an alternative possibility is that this building was in use much earlier on, explaining the conflicting references.

In commenting upon the debate about *aula* and *camera*, Grenville (1997, 86–8) has argued that the functions of *camera* and *aula* overlapped, and that the distinction between these terms may have been less clear to medieval contemporaries than we assume. She has also suggested a social explanation for the need for these distinct buildings in the early 13th century, which may not have been present in the 12th century, and has suggested that one building may have served for both on some sites (Grenville 1997, 88). It is possible, therefore, that there was no distinct aisled hall at the Mount House until 1244. The matter can only be resolved by further excavation.

THE LAYOUT OF THE 12TH-CENTURY MANOR *Incorporating comments kindly supplied by John Blair*

Evidence for reconstructing the early- to mid-12th-century house is limited, both because the excavated parts may comprise less than half of the whole, and because they are so simple in plan and details that there is little scope for functional interpretation. Extrapolating the complete plan depends partly on the excavated and documentary evidence for the layout of the later buildings and moat, and partly on contemporary parallels.

By the mid-13th century the accounts suggest that the main buildings were laid out around a courtyard, which had a two-storeyed East Range, the solar tower at the south-east corner, the hall aligned north-south on the west and the gate on the north (see Chapter 6 section 1 and Fig. 6.1). It is clear that this plan was accretive, and there is at present no conclusive evidence that anything except the Solar Tower, the East Range and the chapel dated from as early as the mid-12th century. The excavations have shown that by the end of the 12th century the main building complex extended along two sides of the rectangular courtyard, and at least one other range had been built against the north curtain wall. Other buildings have been detected by geophysical survey along the west and south-west, but whether these existed in the 12th century is unknown. Nonetheless, the Mount House can be compared with an expanding range of excavated bishop's houses of the 12th century.

At one end of the spectrum are fully enclosed quadrangular layouts. The type sites are the two fortified houses built by Bishop Roger of Salisbury

(1107–39) at Sherborne and at Old Sarum castle (RCHM 1952, 64–6 and plan; RCHME 1980, 6–11 and plan; Stalley 1971, 65–70; White 1983). The main ranges are set around square courtyards with covered walks like cloisters, and in each case there is a corner tower. Halls probably occupied the south range at Sherborne and the west at Old Sarum; the facing ranges, in other words the north at Sherborne and the east at Old Sarum, are storeyed, with large upper chambers. Roger's tower at Sherborne provides a close analogy for the Mount House Solar Tower, being very similar in scale and proportions apart from its thicker walls (Fig. 7.2). These residences are built all at once (Shortt 1965, 36), and therefore allow little room for growth (pers. comm. B. Durham).

The origins of this mode of episcopal house-planning are various. Roger's two houses, with their tight, integrated plans and covered walkways, show the influence of monastic cloisters. The basic idea of a courtyard layout including a tower, however, is evidently older, going back to mid-11th-century models such as the houses at Portchester (excavated) and Abingdon (described in a chronicle), or late-11th-century quasi-monastic establishments illustrated by Minster Court, Thanet (Blair 1993, 10–11).

The manors of Henry of Blois, Bishop of Winchester, are, however, more loosely laid out. The original buildings do not form part of a complete courtyard plan, and like the Mount House they developed accretively. Wolvesey, at Winchester, begins as a single north-south block, the West Hall, incorporating tower, range and garderobes, very similar in overall plan to the Mount House site. It then acquires a chapel, and soon afterwards an open hall (the East Hall). At this point there are two roughly parallel ranges, with the chapel across part of one end. These are linked by a curtain wall to form an enclosed quadrangular layout, probably as part of the defensive fortifications documented in 1138, and subsequently a kitchen (designed to resemble a keep) and a garderobe tower are added on the east side of the hall. Finally, a north gatehouse range was added. This palace developed a quadrangular enclosed plan in a relatively short period of time, due originally to the defensive needs of the Anarchy, and was perhaps influenced by Bishop Roger's designs and by Henry of Blois' origins as a monk at Cluny.

The original plan of the bishop's residence at Bishop's Waltham is unfortunately hard to disentangle from the fragmentary and much-altered remains. The excavations of the earliest phase have not been published, and an outline plan (Riall 1994, 12) is not easy to comprehend or interpret. Probably dating from late in Henry's episcopate are linear south and west ranges which meet at a tower at the south-west angle (recalling the one at Wolvesey), and a chapel basement which may have been part of an East Range. The manors of the bishops of Winchester at Taunton and Farnham are very different, having true keeps, and are not therefore closely comparable, and, despite recent excavations, only part of a single range of the 12th-century palace built by Henry of

Blois at Southwark has been uncovered (Yale 1989, 37; Steane 2001, 63).

Other 12th-century bishops' palaces such as Norwich (Whittingham 1949, 86–7; Artherton *et al.* 1996, 109–111), Canterbury (Rady *et al.* 1991) and Lincoln (Chapman *et al.* 1975) have ranges at right angles, those at Norwich abutting the cathedral and enclosing part of three sides of a quadrangle. At Lincoln the East Hall is accompanied by a private chapel on the north and a short range attached to a solar or private chamber on the south, the fourth side of the court being closed by a curtain wall. The southern range, which included garderobes, was shown to be contemporary with the East Hall and later than the original phase of the eastern curtain wall. The chapel was rebuilt in the 15th century over an earlier structure of unknown date. Canterbury has only two 12th-century ranges, but curtain walls enclose the other sides of a courtyard, and this palace gradually develops a quadrangular plan.

The first stone house at the Mount House site was then a variant on a theme. The tower was at the south-east corner, as against the south-west (as at Henry's other houses and at Sherborne) or the north-east (as at Old Sarum); it may have been located for maximum prominence when seen from across the Windrush. The chapel position, on the other hand, is closely matched by Bishop's Waltham. Given that the chapel would probably have been approached directly from the bishop's apartments, it is likely in both these cases that there was a large chamber on the first floor of the East Range, at the Mount House presumably communicating directly with the bishop's chamber on the first floor of the Solar Tower.

The Mount House does not appear to have had a quadrangular layout from the start and belongs to the group of residences that achieved this plan gradually. It is probable that there was an open hall on the west by the late 12th century, if not in Henry of Blois' time, perhaps the hall described in the 13th-century accounts; but nothing further can usefully be said about this, or about possible ranges on the south-west and north-east, without further excavation.

WITNEY IN THE ANARCHY

During the reign of Stephen, Oxfordshire saw a good deal of activity, both political and military. Stephen visited Oxford twice in 1136, first besieging and taking the castle, and later holding a council, and it was at another council in Oxford that he arrested Bishop Roger of Salisbury and his nephew, Bishop Alexander of Lincoln, in 1139 (Stevenson 1977, 8). He was again probably in Oxford in 1140, though thereafter the castle governor declared for the Empress Matilda, and was not retaken until 1142 (Cooper 1979, 11). Wallingford, held for the Empress Matilda by Brian FitzCount, was besieged in 1139, in 1145–6 and again in 1152 (Bond 1986, 149). In 1142 Empress Matilda built fortifications at Woodstock and Radcot, and fortified the church tower at Bampton. The last two places were attacked and taken by Stephen before he

besieged Matilda at Oxford (*Gesta Stephani* ed. Potter and Davis 1976, 139–142). In 1144 a castle was built for Matilda at Faringdon, and was taken by storm by Stephen (based at Oxford) in 1145. Stephen visited Oxford on campaign in 1146, 1149 and 1151 (Cooper 1979, 11), and other castles in this area are mentioned in the *Gesta Stephani* (Potter and Davis 1976), one (Bretewelle) tentatively identified by Bond at either Brightwell-cum-Sotwell or Britwell Salome (Bond 1986, 149).

A new tower surrounded by a moat was constructed at Ascot Doilly (Jope and Threlfall 1959, 226–7), and the two adjacent mounds are likely to be the result of warfare in this same period. Existing buildings such as at Deddington and Middleton Stoney were replaced by stronger keeps (Ivens 1984; Rahtz and Rowley 1984, 157). It would therefore seem unlikely that Witney remained entirely unaffected by the war. Blair has suggested that the construction of a defended enclosure on the east side of the ford across the Windrush at Cogges was also carried out during the Anarchy (Blair 1996 in Rowley and Steiner 1996, 140–141; see Fig. 1.3), but although massive walls and early medieval pottery have been found by limited trenching, insufficient excavation has been carried out to substantiate this. It is also suggested that the troubles led to dereliction at the priory of Cogges (Blair and Steane 1982, 47–8).

At the outbreak of hostilities the bishop's manor at the Mount House was defended by a stone tower and curtain wall fronted by a slight ditch. In 1138, Henry of Blois, Bishop of Winchester and brother of King Stephen, built or fortified six castles, but Witney was not listed (Winchester Annals ed. Luard 1865), which is good reason to think that it was not similarly fortified at this time. If the early chronology for Mount House is followed, then the digging of the moat, the insertion of a central pier within the tower and the construction of the enlarged curtain wall could all be measures taken to strengthen the site during the 1140s. If so, the measures were certainly ambitious, as they appear to have included a much larger area than previously, but not necessarily effective, as the excavated moat on the east side was little more than 1 m deep.

The defensive strategy adopted by Bishop Henry of Blois should be seen however in the context of the strategic significance of the sites chosen. The manors that the bishop chose to fortify in 1138 were those in towns (Winchester and Taunton) or commanding important strategic positions (eg Hughes 1989, 51–4). There is no good reason to believe that the town of Witney came into existence as early as the 1130s (see also below). Witney was on the route from Bampton to Bladon, which was called 'Port Way' in 1005 and Woodstock Way in 1299 (Fig. 1.3), and on an east-west road to Eynsham (Rowley and Steiner 1996, 3), but is not mentioned in the *Gesta Stephani* (ed. Potter and Davis 1976). This account is selective in its treatment of the campaigns, and North Oxfordshire castles such as Deddington, Middleton Stoney and Ascot Doilly, all of which were in existence during Stephen's reign,

are not mentioned either. Nevertheless, this may indicate that these sites did not figure prominently in the campaigns of the war. In the campaigns of 1142, Stephen does not seem to have bothered himself with Empress Matilda's fortification at Woodstock, heading straight from Bampton to Oxford.

The neighbouring manor of Cogges, and control of the adjacent ford, was in the hands of the Arsic family, who are believed by Blair to have been supporters of Stephen (Rowley and Steiner 1996, 141). They were thus allies of Henry of Blois, except for a brief period when he went over to the Empress Matilda in 1141. From 1139 Henry of Blois was papal legate, and for much of the 1140s was a very powerful political figure, mediating between Stephen and the Empress Matilda. He also made several visits abroad, including two trips to Rome. The involvement of Bishop Henry of Blois in the political and military struggles of the period probably meant that he rarely visited Witney. It would therefore not be surprising if this period saw little building activity.

THE LATER 12TH CENTURY

In a review of the development of royal and princely palaces in France between 1000 and 1220, Renoux (1996) traces the descent of the use of *aula et camera* as public audience chambers, seats of justice and, by their architectural grandeur, symbols of power from Carolingian origins. The palaces of the 11th and early 12th century see the emergence of towers as part of the palatial repertoire, but it is only in the mid 12th century that the donjon or round tower becomes the predominant element, and the main expression of power. In Britain, while the donjon influences castle development for another 100 years, the construction of towers in bishops' palaces is largely finished after the mid 12th century, due partly to the lessons learnt from the fall of Bishop Roger and his nephews from power in 1139, and partly to the discouragement of Henry II for seigneurial castle building of any sort.

The character of the building added to the Solar Tower in the later 12th century (Periods 4b–c and 5) shows clearly the peaceful intentions of this building campaign, which was intended to extend the accommodation provided. McNeill (1992, 48–51) argues that the accommodation provided in the first half of the 12th century for the lord, not only in castle keeps but also in the courtyard houses of Bishop Roger of Salisbury, consisted of very few rooms, and that this reflected not limitations of space, but the communal lifestyle of the time. In the second half of the century private accommodation was increased, and at the beginning of the 13th century the withdrawal of the lord from public living becomes evident. This is precisely the sequence indicated by the development of the Solar Tower at Mount House.

Documentary background

As stated (Chapters 1 and 7), there are no direct references to a bishop staying at Witney in the 12th

century, nor in the royal itineraries. It is not possible, therefore, even to suggest which bishop may have been responsible for the building campaigns at the site. Itineraries of the 11th- and 12th-century bishops, however, have been published (Franklin 1993, Appendix III), and the recorded visits to Woodstock and Oxford indicate times when the bishop may have visited Witney. In addition, other information about periods when the bishop was abroad or ill may help to narrow down the possibilities.

Henry II was very fond of Woodstock; in 1163 it was at Woodstock that King Malcolm of Scotland, Welsh princes and English nobles paid homage to Henry II (James 1990, 52–3). This was where his mistress Rosamund resided, and Henry II went so far as to plant the town of New Woodstock, ostensibly for his retainers (Rodwell 1975, 191). Henry was in Oxford in 1155, his son Richard was born there in 1157, and Henry was again at Beaumont Palace in 1163, and attended an ecclesiastical council in Oxford in 1165 (Cooper 1979, 12). His son John was born at Beaumont Palace in 1167.

Bishop Henry of Blois attended upon the new king in January 1155, but shortly afterwards went into voluntary exile at Cluny in France from late in 1155–8. Thereafter further building at Witney would be consonant with the renewed importance of Woodstock and Oxford nearby. Henry of Blois is generally regarded as having been less involved in public affairs during the last part of his long episcopate, ie from 1158 to 1171 (Franklin 1993, xlix). He was however still a very wealthy member of the royal family, likely to have wished to maintain an influence at court. Only in his last years, when it appears that a final long illness preceded his death, is direct interest in manors such as Witney improbable (Franklin 1993, xlvi).

Henry's successor, Richard of Ilchester, was a loyal servant of Henry II, and was absent in Normandy for long periods in the early years of his bishopric on the king's business. He was abroad for the first half of 1174, and although recorded at Woodstock on 1 July 1175, was probably in Normandy in the first quarter of 1176, and certainly from September 1176 until March 1178 as justiciar (Franklin 1993, l). Even when back in England he was often on circuit to participate in royal councils until 1183, though after this his role in public life declines, possibly exacerbated by ill-health from 1185–6 (Franklin 1993, li footnote 79). Royal councils were held at Oxford in 1177, 1180 and 1186, and the king was also present in 1175 (Cooper 1979, 12). These may have been occasions when Bishop Richard was at Witney. He died in 1189. The Waverley chronicler's obituary included the statement *aedificia vero admiranda in episcopatu faciens, quae in progenie ad progeniem nomen suum vocant in terris suis*, indicating that he had also been a notable builder (Waverley Annales ed. Luard 1865, 246–7).

In contrast, Godfrey de Lucy was rarely absent from England after becoming bishop, being in Normandy in 1190 and again in 1198 (Franklin 1993, liii). He is the most frequently recorded visitor to Oxfordshire, being at Oxford in February, June

and July in 1191, in July and August in 1192 and on 3 August in 1204. The dates of the summer visits in both 1191 and 1192 suggest that the bishop may have spent one or two weeks in Oxfordshire at these times. Royal councils were held at Oxford (in King Richard's absence) in 1193 and again in 1197 (Cooper 1979, 12), and again under King John in 1204, the same year that the bishop died.

Godfrey de Lucy was succeeded by Peter des Roches, and it is during his episcopate that the Winchester account rolls begin. King John spent much time in Oxford, spending Christmas there in 1205, and was again there in 1207 (Cooper 1979, 12). He summoned knights to him there in 1213, and during the barons' war met them several times there in 1215 (Cooper 1979, 12). We also have documentary evidence that King John stayed at Witney on several occasions (Chapter 1), and building in preparation for the king's visit is specifically recorded.

While general information about the 12th century bishops can provide background to the development of the Witney manor house, it cannot offer help in tying down the building phases, or identify who provided the inspiration for much of the work. While it is more likely that new building would follow from an episcopal visit, we do not have complete itineraries for these bishops, and it is also possible that these busy prelates ordered work from afar.

THE EMBANKING IN AND AROUND THE SOLAR TOWER

As discussed in Chapter 7, the possible sources that may have influenced the development of embanking around and within the solar tower at the Mount House are many. The construction of Roger of Salisbury's fortified palace at Old Sarum involved the infilling of the courtyard enclosed by the buildings to form a raised garden at first floor level. Raised external terraces existed at Wolvesey, and at French sites with which Henry of Blois had connections (Biddle 1986, 30). Low banks derived from moat construction were commonly thrown up around towers as at Ascot Doilly, and larger earthen mottes were piled around the base of towers at sites like Farnham (though the West Block at the Mount House was built upon an embankment only 1.2 m high). Infilling to make a solid basement within the tower was employed not only for keeps such as Pevensey and Kenilworth (Cathcart-King 1988, 70–72), but throughout the chamber block of the West Hall at Wolvesey (Biddle 1986, 29). Despite this multiplicity of possible influences, however, the close parallels and association with Wolvesey suggest that it provides the model for much of the development of the principal buildings at the Mount House (see Chapters 2 and 7).

There is, however, another possible influence upon the creation of the east terrace, that of the imagery associated with medieval gardens. There is little written evidence for medieval gardens, but the 9th-century plan of the monastery of St Gall shows three

square gardens within it. This is the general shape found in medieval illustrations when they begin to appear in the late medieval period, and the east terrace itself approximates to a square. The walled garden has a special Christian symbolism as the virgin bride of Solomon's Song of Songs, and by implication the Virgin Mary (Thacker 1979, 83). In the later 12th century a number of literary texts appear which describe the ideal garden, the *locus amoenus*. The French play *Mystère d'Adam* (dated 1150–60) has stage directions for Paradise: 'Paradise is set up in a high place. . . with scented flowers and leaves. . . various trees and fruits hanging from them, so that it appears a *locus amoenissimus*' (Thacker 1979, 89). This combination of symbolism was probably an influence on the creation of the raised garden at the Mount House (Fig. 6.1).

From the documentary record it appears that this was a herb garden (Chapter 6). Although descriptions of ideal gardens suggest that they could contain a variety of trees and flowers, those texts that deal with real gardens (Walafrid Strabo in the 9th century, Albertus Magnus in the mid-13th century) suggest that gardens were usually for a limited variety of plants, and small gardens almost invariably for herbs (Thacker 1979, 86).

THE FOUNDATION OF THE PLANNED TOWN OF WITNEY

The planned layout of the properties either side of the green (formerly the medieval market-place), with the church of St Mary at its base, and the anomalous status of the manor and church within Curbridge, not Witney, has already been commented upon (Chapter 1). The date of the foundation of this town is uncertain, as no excavation of any size has taken place in the town centre. Both the church and manorial buildings contain architectural evidence for a 12th-century date; the rectory formerly contained a small building of probable 13th-century date (Giles 1852, 38–9), but presumably originated before this at the same time as the church.

The alignment of the early manorial buildings (including the chapel, which is 8–9 degrees north of east-west) is not the same as that of the church (20 degrees north of east-west), which probably indicates that they were not laid out contemporarily (see Fig. 5.7). The architecture of the church (Chapter 5) would suggest that it belonged in the late 11th or early 12th century, while the tower appears to belong firmly in the early 12th century.

It has already been suggested that the laying out of the early stone buildings may have been related to the promotion of a river crossing, which the layout of the market place does not emphasise. This would imply that the planned town came later. The triangular market-place was laid out so that the fronts of the tenements on its east side were in line with the east side of the north gate of the excavated courtyard; those on the west were probably in line with the entrance to the rectory house (Figs 6.1 and 6.2). The frontages of

the southernmost tenements on the east side appear to be at right angles to the line of the north curtain wall, which is parallel to the alignment of the church (Fig. 5.5). The axis of the market-place as a whole, however, was not aligned at right-angles to the church and curtain wall of the manor, but at an angle to it. This axis is roughly at right-angles to Corn Street, which runs across its apex and this may have been the dominant factor in laying out the green (Figs 1.1 and 1.3).

The layout of the town suggests that it postdates the establishment of the line of the northern curtain wall and the entrance into the manorial courtyard. The northern curtain wall and gatehouse is not, unfortunately, firmly dated, but its character is similar to that of wall 354 south of the tower, which is dated after 1140 (on the early chronology) or 1170 (on the later chronology). The entrance, however, was also marked by ditch 588 on the north, whose alignment is also parallel to that of the church, and which predates the moat and probably also the northern curtain wall. The relative date of 588 in relation to the primary stone buildings has not been established, though the lack of significant silting in 588 before the construction of the moat would tend to suggest that 588 did not long predate the moat.

The planting of towns has a long pedigree; in Oxfordshire it includes the defended towns of the late Saxon Burghal Hidage at Wallingford and Oxford. In the Norman period there was a pattern of predominantly royal, ecclesiastical and castle-associated town foundations during the period 1066–1135, a dip in the mid 12th century during the Anarchy, and then a boom from c 1160 to 1230 (Blair 2000, 261). Some of the new towns were created by granting of burgage status to existing settlements, but at Saffron Walden, Chipping Ongar, Pleshey and Devizes the castle earthworks and the enclosing bank of the town were evidently planned and laid out in one operation. Among examples of planned towns outside castles that are believed to date to the first half of the 12th century are Castle Rising in Norfolk and Bolsover in Derbyshire (Morley and Gurney 1997, 1–2 and Appendix 3), and as regards Oxfordshire, Burford was probably newly-planted when it obtained burgage status soon after 1086 (Blair 2000, 259). A 12th-century origin has been postulated for Chipping Norton under the FitzAlans (Bond 1986, 138).

Thompson has recently argued that the castles built by bishops in the first half of 12th century were constructed primarily to create a new town or enhance an existing one (1998, 157). It has been suggested that Bishop Alexander of Lincoln laid out the triangular market place at Banbury at the same time as he constructed his palace at Banbury, sometime between 1125 and 1136 (Fasham 1973, 315). There are, however, also good parallels for this practice in the later 12th century. Sometime after 1158 Henry of Blois remodelled the town adjacent to his manor at Bishop's Waltham into a grid of nine streets (Beresford 1959, 195), and also moved the parish church (Hare 1987, 21), and in the 1180s the town of New Woodstock was

created by Henry II 'because the king's men were lodged too far from his manor' (*Rotuli Hundredorum*, ii (Rec. Comm., 1818), 839).

The evidence from Witney would suggest that the laying out of the town belongs in Blair's later 12th- and early 13th-century group. Even if the early chronology is adopted, it seems unlikely that the town would have been laid out shortly after the construction of the northern curtain wall and the digging of the moat during the period of the Anarchy. A date sometime after 1158 is therefore the earliest plausible context for the foundation of the town. One possibility is that the 'town' or 'borough' at Witney was laid out in the latter part of Henry of Blois' episcopate (1158–1170), and (if we follow the early chronology) is perhaps related to the payment made to Henry II from 1162 and to the building programme undertaken at the manor in Periods 4c and 5a.

Beresford (1959, 189 and 197), however, dated the foundation to the turn of the 12th and 13th centuries, arguing that the granting of new plots in 1208/9 and the fact that the borough revenues were only separated from those of the manor in 1210 meant that the town was of recent origin when the Winchester account rolls began. The grant of a charter to William Lambert and his fellows in 1210/11 was taken by Hyde to be a new borough charter (1954, 53), although Beresford commented that the charter was probably for villeins already resident within the estate, and was thus confirming their personal change of status (Beresford 1959, 206 note 54).

Beresford described the foundation of six new towns by the bishops of Winchester in Hampshire during the first half of the 13th century, two of which, New Alresford (established 1200) and Downton (established between 1200 and 1208), have a very similar plan to that at Witney. Both have a wide street leading to a main road at one end, and at New Alresford a new church is built at the opposite end, mirroring Witney very closely (Beresford 1959, 190–195). Beresford speculated as to whether Witney might have been the origin of this plan, but concluded that the plan is too obvious to need a particular origin.

There was clearly a marked period of growth at Witney in the early 13th century, since we know that at this time part of Grimesmead was acquired from the prior of Cogges, and 16 new messuages are recorded in 1219/20 in the meadow next to the bridge towards Cogges (Fig. 1.3). This appears to be the medieval bridge, now replaced, which crossed the Windrush upstream of Cogges, and which is described by Giles as a bridge of three arches (Giles 1852, 17). The development of Bridge Street northwards, and by implication the recent construction of this bridge, diverted much of the passing traffic from the old route down Corn Street and across the ford at Cogges to the new bridge, so bypassing Cogges altogether. It may have been this which prompted the Arsic family, the manorial lords of Cogges just across the Windrush, to plant a settlement called Newland north of the manor adjacent to the main road in 1215 (*V.C.H. Oxon.* xii, 106).

The documented extension to the town in the early 13th century is in part simply a reflection of the economic prosperity of the country as a whole, which saw the proliferation of new towns and markets by ecclesiastical and secular landowners alike. Locally, similar planned extensions (Newland and New Thame) were added by the abbey of Eynsham in 1215 and by the bishop of Lincoln before 1219 respectively (Bond 1986, 138–9; 137). There is growing evidence that Abingdon Abbey added several new streets on the north side of the abbey in the very late 12th century, though this abbey never granted burghage status to the town (Allen 1990, 76).

As mentioned above, the close relationship between Peter Des Roches and King John, and the consequent royal visits to the town, will certainly have encouraged trade and growth. The visits of the king, however, were only made possible by the substantial building programme of the later 12th and early 13th centuries, which in itself probably promoted more growth. A substantial building programme meant the arrival of a team of skilled artisans such as masons, carpenters, glaziers, and demand for a much larger number of labourers. Some of this work will have provided supplementary income for the local population, and the incomers will have provided an additional market for local goods. This work will not have been continuous, and it is not suggested that in itself it permanently enlarged the population of Witney, but it may have been on a sufficient scale to encourage the appearance of a variety of services which, once a regular market had been established, were able to support themselves from the surrounding area.

CONTACTS AND STATUS

The finds provide a good picture of the general character of the site. In addition to the pottery traditions normally found as a result of local production (the early West Oxfordshire wares) and regional ceramic marketing patterns, involving wares such as those from Brill/Boarstall, from Newbury and from Minety, there is also evidence for other sources: several sherds from Surrey, Hampshire (including Winchester), the west (Bath), the north-west (Worcester) and the north-east (Olney Hyde and North Midlands) were found.

Some of these sources are represented by a very few sherds, and probably represent chance acquisitions or presents relating to the bishop's contacts. These include the single sherds of Fabric 8 from Winchester, Fabric 32 from Surrey and Fabric 16 from Worcester (all Period 5a), the three sherds of Fabric 20 from Surrey (Periods 5b, 7 and 8) and the single sherds of Fabric 31 from Olney Hyde (Period 6a) and Fabric 33 from Nash Hill, Wilts (Period 6b). Another single sherd from Worcester (Fabric 38) is found in Period 7. Other traditions represented by slightly larger numbers of sherds are Fabric 13 from the North Midlands with 7 sherds (5 in Period 5a, 2 in Period 7) and Fabric 23 from Bath/Trowbridge with 19 sherds (17 in Period 6, 2 in Period 7).

The impression given by these imports is of continuing contacts with areas outside the region from the later 12th century until the 15th century. It is possible that some of the sherds are residual, and that only a few short periods of contact are represented, perhaps coinciding with visits of the bishop of Winchester to the Mount House. In Period 5a, for instance, the presence of Fabric 8 from Winchester and Fabric 32 from Surrey may be the result of visits during the reign of King John, and the sherd from Worcester from the involvement of Witney in the Welsh campaign of 1211. The three sherds of Fabric 20 could also all have arrived at this time (two being redeposited later on), as could the seven sherds from the North Midlands (two being redeposited).

The 12th-century coins include one feudal denier from Normandy, a type normally found close to the south coast of Britain, and probably also brought by the bishop or his retinue during Period 5a. Overall the small finds do not give an impression of great wealth, but bearing in mind the relatively small scale of excavation the assemblage is broadly comparable to that from the excavation of other contemporary high-status sites.

The animal bones, fishbones and plant remains show a varied and high-status diet, as would be expected. Serjeantson has commented upon the relatively low proportion of marine fish compared to freshwater fish, which she attributes to the distance of Witney from the coast (Chapter 4). At the Blackfriars in Oxford nearby, however, the fishbones were dominated by marine species, and Lambrick (1985, 205–6) attributed this to the lack of fishponds attached to the urban friaries in contrast to rural manors and abbeys. At the Mount House the fishponds were in existence when documentary records began: the account roll for 1208/9 mentions the gate by the fishpond. Serjeantson further comments upon the quantity of fishbones, and suggests that this may reflect the importance of fish in the ecclesiastical diet. Studies of the Hampshire manors of the bishop of Winchester have shown the importance of fishponds in the economy, though the staple diet according to the household accounts was marine fish, farmed freshwater fish being a luxury for the bishop's table (Thompson 1998, 151). The Hampshire fishponds were in existence before documentary records began, and Roberts (1986, 125–6) has attributed their creation to Henry of Blois; it is possible that the Mount House fishponds also date from this episcopate.

The deer, hare and bird bones reflect the existence of Witney Park adjacent to the manor. In common with most high-status sites, native red and roe deer decline in numbers, and by the 14th-century only fallow deer are present. From a study of the parks of the bishop of Winchester in Hampshire, Thompson (1998, 152–3) has shown that there were 23 parks on the Winchester estates, divided into enclosed parks and open chases. The Witney park belongs to the former category, and is of normal size (100–200 acres) for this type. Roberts (1988, 78) has also shown

that by the 14th century only fallow deer were bred in the Winchester parks, explaining the absence of the other species from the bone record.

In his recent publication on medieval bishops' houses, Thompson (1998, 10) states that many bishops avoided the episcopal see palace, showing a marked preference for one of their other manors, and quotes as an example the survival of the largely 12th-century buildings at Wolvesey. As is shown by the Winchester account rolls (Biddle 1986, 14–21), much time and expense was spent by some bishops at Wolvesey, but it is true that the 12th-century buildings remained fundamentally unaltered. If the Buck drawing of the Mount House has any truth in it, it would suggest a similar conservatism at this site, and this is to some extent borne out by the building accounts, which only

occasionally mention new buildings, though there is much expense on repairs.

A full search of the Winchester account rolls has not been undertaken, and therefore a comprehensive list of the visits of the bishops of Winchester to Witney has not been compiled, but the building accounts certainly suggest that in general the bishop was an infrequent visitor after the time of King John and Henry III, work in preparation for a visit being recorded only in 1211/2, 1247/8, 1305/6, 1325/6, 1335/6 and 1379/80.

The manorial accounts show that the manor was kept in good repair throughout the 15th century, but there is very little excavated evidence that pertains to this period, which is therefore outside the scope of the present volume.