# Investigations at Wayneflete's Tower, Esher

### STEVE THOMPSON and VAUGHAN BIRBECK

Evaluation at Wayneflete's Tower, Esher, Surrey, the former gatehouse of the 15th century palace of Esher built by William Wayneflete, Bishop of Winchester, was undertaken by Channel 4's Time Team. The results have allowed a better understanding of the building complex to be established. Documentary evidence and the results from 19th century excavations were also used in conjunction with the information recovered from the Time Team geophysical survey and trial trench evaluation. Dendrochronological dating of timbers from Wayneflete's Tower provided a felling date range of 1462–72, which corresponds with a period that master mason John Cowper was believed to be working at Esher.

### Introduction

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Channel 4's *Time Team* at Wayneflete's Tower, Esher in September 2005 to investigate the site of the *Esher Episcopi* and the 15th century palace of the bishops of Winchester. The fieldwork, comprising dendrochonological survey, geophysical survey and eight evaluation trenches, was concentrated within the garden of what is now known as Wayneflete's Tower, the former gatehouse entrance to the palace complex. Limited excavation and geophysical survey was also carried out in the gardens of neighbouring properties.

The site, which lies on Kempton Park Gravel at an approximate height of 14m OD, includes the extant Grade I listed building and Scheduled Monument (Surrey 212), of Wayneflete's Tower (centred on NGR 513080 165100; fig 1). This former gatehouse is a remnant of the 15th century palace of Esher, built by William Wayneflete, Bishop of Winchester on the site of an earlier manor, the history of which can be documented to the time of Edward the Confessor. The four-storey brick tower, which was altered by William Kent in the early 18th century, has been restored and is currently used as a family home (Videotext Communications 2005).

This note presents the main findings of the fieldwork, further details of which, including finds reports, may be found in the evaluation report (Wessex Archaeology 2006) and in the site archive. The archive is currently held by Wessex Archaeology under the project code 59472 and site code WAY05. It will in due course be deposited with Elmbridge Museum, Surrey.

### Historical background

The earliest attested reference to Esher is in the Domesday Book (Aissela and Aissele) with later references as Esser (1229) and Assere (1242). Earlier forms of the place-name mentioned in Anglo-Saxon charters cannot be accepted with confidence. A possibly genuine charter of 1005 exists as a c 1200 copy and another, purporting to be a charter of 1062, is a mid-13th century fabrication. In the 1060s the manor of Esher was held by Tovi on behalf of Edward the Confessor and was subsequently given to the abbot of Croix St Laifroy by William I. The manor was bought by William Raleigh, Bishop of Winchester, in 1245. In 1538 it was given to Henry VIII by Bishop Stephen Gardiner and incorporated into the lands of Hampton Court (VCH, 3, 448).

The bishops of Winchester were probably responsible for the first major buildings in the complex as it was a convenient stopping point between the bishop's palaces at Southwark and Winchester. The earliest structure was possibly a lodge and chapel built in the mid–late 13th century, presumably before Edward I's visit in 1289. This structure was enlarged during

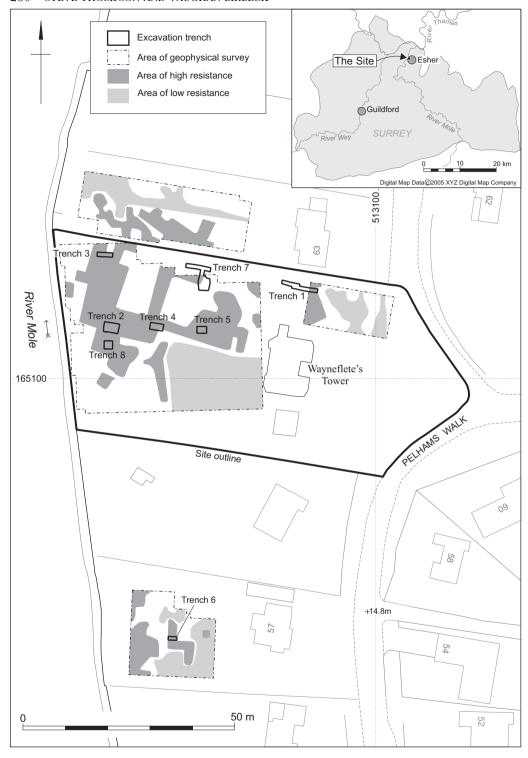


Fig 1 Wayneflete's Tower, Esher. Location of the site showing position of evaluation trenches and geophysical survey. (© Crown copyright Ordnance Survey. All rights reserved)

the episcopate of Bishop John Stratford (1323–33), who built the first manor house around 1331 (Floyer 1920, 73; Hutchins 2001, 14).

In 1447 William of Wayneflete became bishop of Winchester and continued to use the manor at Esher as a temporary residence. Towards the end of his life Wayneflete turned his attention to the manor at Esher, perhaps in the period  $\varepsilon$  1475–80 (Brodie 1994, 2).

The extent of the palace built by Wayneflete can be established from cartographic evidence and written descriptions. A map by Ralph Treswell dated 1606, reproduced in outline by Floyer (1920, fig 1) (fig 2), shows that the surviving Wayneflete's Tower was the main entrance into the palace from the east. The palace consisted of a central courtyard with the gatehouse on the eastern side with a range of narrow buildings along the northern perimeter. Positioned in the north-west corner of the courtyard was a keep-like structure, of a similar design to the gatehouse, probably a chamber tower. On the south side of the chamber tower was a series of buildings extending to the south. The entrance to these buildings was directly opposite the main entrance through the gatehouse, which implies that these buildings included the Great Hall and the residential areas of the palace. The southern perimeter consisted of a long east—west aligned structure, separated from the main courtyard by a dividing wall (Floyer 1920, 74).

Analysis of the 1606 map provides information concerning the size and scale of the palace at Esher, with further details being provided by John Aubrey who visited the palace in 1673, drawing both an elevation and a sketch plan (fig 3). In Aubrey's sketch plan the position of the gatehouse is clear, and annotated as '[a] gatehouse with portcullis and hollow battlements'. A north—south aligned 'terrace' is identified extending from the north side of the gatehouse to the east—west aligned building forming the northern perimeter of the palace, and annotated as 'timber built lodgings'. The 'terrace' is shown as having a solid back wall with archways

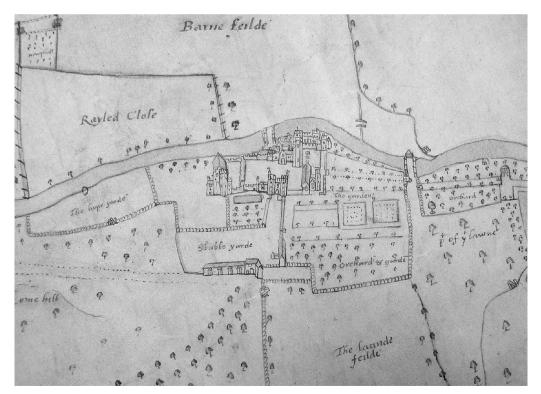


Fig 2 Wayneflete's Tower, Esher. Ralph Treswell's 1606 map. (Reproduced by kind permission of The National Archives)

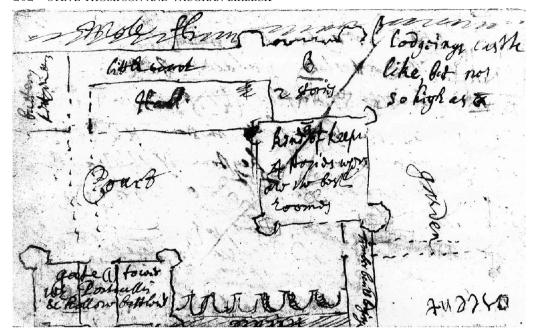


Fig 3 Wayneflete's Tower, Esher. John Aubrey's 1673 sketch plan (Bod: MS Aubrey 4, fol 45br). (Reproduced by kind permission of the Bodleian Library, Oxford)

opening out into the central courtyard, with the 'timber built lodgings' abutting the eastern wall of the chamber tower. The Aubrey sketch plan is conspicuous by the lack of buildings recorded compared with the 1606 map, suggesting a number of these were demolished during the intervening period.

The manor of *Esher Episcopi* had, until the time of Wayneflete, been of relative unimportance – one of several potential stopping points between the bishop's palaces at Southwark and Wolvesey in Winchester.

Following the death of Bishop Wayneflete in April 1486 the ownership of the palace changed several times and numerous remodellings and rebuildings took place. An engraving from the early 1700s (Hutchins 2001, 28–9; Knyff & Kip 1707; reproduced in Wessex Archaeology 2006, fig 4) shows that significant alterations occurred to the palace, although it was not until the 18th century that the Great Hall, the chamber tower, the main body of the house and the north and south sides of the quadrangle were demolished (Floyer 1920, 76–7).

The land of the manor was subsequently bought by Thomas Pelham, later the Duke of Newcastle, who incorporated the lands into his Claremont estate. The Pelham family modernised the medieval buildings and altered the formal layout of the gardens of Esher Place in the early 18th century with the aid of the leading architect and gardener William Kent (Hutchins 2001, 33 and pl 19; Symes 1988, 19).

Kent pulled down all the buildings within the estate apart from the gatehouse itself, to which he added two massive three-storey wings in a pseudo-gothic style. He also added an entrance porch, and three quatrefoil mouldings, two on the top floors of the turret and one on the second floor above the porch. Another alteration of Kent's was to move the courtyard from the west of the gatehouse to the east, so that the front of the gatehouse opened onto the courtyard.

The estate was sold in 1805 to the first non-titled owner of the property, stockbroker John Spicer. Spicer pulled down most of Kent's work, and left only the gatehouse itself, the

materials being used for the building of a larger Palladian style house which remained in the Spicer family until it was bought by Sir Edgar Vincent, later Lord D'Abernon, in 1893. D'Abernon erected the present building at Esher Place incorporating Spicer's house into the south-east wing some time between 1893 and 1895 (Floyer 1920).

A late 19th century account of the extant buildings, including illustrations of the gatehouse and stencilled lilies on the stairs of the gatehouse, is provided by Nevill (1880).

A number of investigations of the site have taken place, the earliest of which was undertaken by the D'Abernons in 1912 and reported on by the Reverend J K Floyer (1920) (fig 4). The excavations took place to the north of the tower in an attempt to locate the moat. A number of structural features relating to Esher Place were found though no moat was ever discovered.

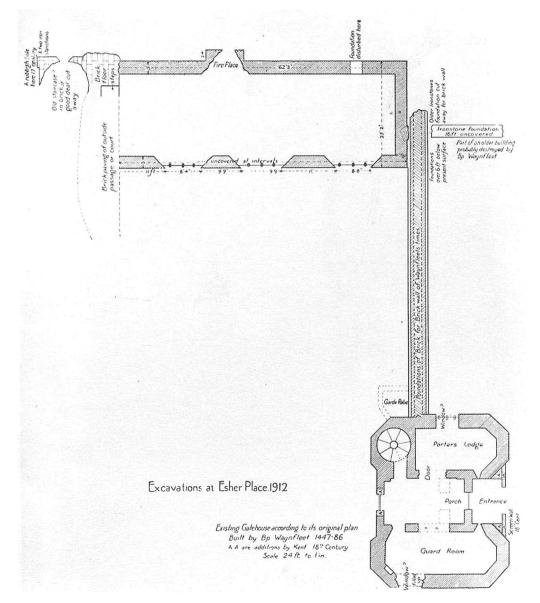


Fig 4 Wayneflete's Tower, Esher. Plan of the 1912 excavations (Floyer 1920). (Reproduced by kind permission of the Society of Antiquaries of London)

Floyer describes 'a range of rooms with an upper storey approached by a newel staircase at the river end. The windows face the court, and there was a fireplace at the back. The building, which was brick, may have been a bachelor's lodging. When opening up the foundations of the wall connecting the north side of the gatehouse with the end of this range of buildings, it was discovered that the foundation cut across an older stone wall' (Floyer 1920, 70). The rooms identified in 1912 are possibly the remains of the 'timber built lodging' identified on Aubrey's 1673 sketch plan with the connecting wall that of the terrace but, as the north side of the gatehouse has seen much alteration with the addition of, and subsequent demolition of, wings and perimeter walls, it is unclear from which phase the identified walls derive. The earlier stone footings could potentially be associated with the early lodge and chapel.

# Dendrochronological survey

Oxford Dendrochronology Laboratory undertook the dendrochronological survey of Wayneflete's Tower (Worthington & Miles 2005). Six timbers were sampled from what appeared to be the primary construction phase of the building, five of which were suitable for processing. These five were found to cross-match, spanning the period 1392–1450. As none of the samples retained complete sapwood an estimated felling date range of 1457–89 was calculated using the empirical sapwood estimate of 9–41 years (Miles 1997). This range was reduced to 1462–72 using OxCal (Miles 2006).

## Geophysical survey

The results of the geophysical survey (GSB 2005), in particular the resistance survey, have produced a surprisingly clear picture of some of the foundations associated with the palace buildings (fig 1). The Great Hall and part of the chamber tower have been identified and their existence confirmed by excavation. Elsewhere there are indications of the survival of further elements of the complex although their precise archaeological interpretation has not been established.

## **Evaluation trenching**

Eight trenches were opened to investigate possible archaeological remains identified by the geophysical survey (fig 1). In trenches 3 and 6 evidence for demolition and landscaping was found. Finds, ranging in date from the medieval to the post-medieval periods, were recovered from all of the trenches, although very few of these came from secure archaeological features. In the absence of secure dating, phasing is based on stratigraphic relationships, the date and function being inferred from the character, stratigraphic position and, in some cases, cartographic evidence.

#### EARLIER MEDIEVAL

The earliest features encountered comprised masonry wall foundations in trenches 2 and 4 (fig 5). In trench 2 the wall foundation was traced for 1m and was 0.46m wide and 0.10m high. It was composed of flint nodules and green sandstone blocks bonded with lime mortar. In trench 4 the remains of a similarly proportioned and constructed wall foundation were found. Both walls appear to have been substantially widened at some point.

The similarity of these walls to the description of the early wall recorded in the 1912 excavations may suggest that they represent parts of the foundation for a single-storey, timber-framed hall, possibly dating from the early to mid-13th century. The later widening of these structures would have allowed for the construction of a larger building, possibly, in view of their location, the 'Great Hall' of Wayneflete's palace. Early 13th to late 14th century pottery was found in later deposits, attesting to activity during this period.

#### WAYNEFLETE'S PALACE

Structural remains thought to represent various parts of Wayneflete's palace were located in trenches 1, 2, 4, 5, 7 and 8. In addition to the suggested widening of the earlier foundations in trenches 2 and 4, described above, and their incorporation into the fabric of the later palace, what may be the remains of the eastern wall of the complex were recorded in trench 1; part of the chamber tower was found in trench 7; fragmentary remains of part of a possible ancillary building was revealed in trench 8; and a metalled surface, possibly part of the courtyard was recorded in trench 5.

In trench 1 a north—south aligned brick wall and an associated brick surface were thought to represent the remains of the eastern wall of the palace. This wall had been rebuilt, or repaired, with the construction of a 0.50m-thick brick wall, in English bond with a brick rubble core and supported by a brick buttress on its eastern side. Associated with this was a wall positioned approximately 1.2m to the west. The structure comprised eight brick courses with the foundation brickwork consisting of three courses of worn re-used stretchers. Overlying the foundation was a two-course rectangular plinth (0.70m long x 0.60m wide), which was in turn built on by a triangular plinth, each side measuring 0.60m. These features have been interpreted as a corridor with a solid wall to the east and archways to the west, opening out into the courtyard. It is probable that this is the wall identified in the 1912 excavations (fig 5), which would also accord with Aubrey's sketch plan of 1673.

The earliest archaeological features identified in trench 7 were the foundations for the octagonal corner turret of the chamber tower (fig 6). The foundation (context 713) cut natural gravel and was probably excavated in a single event. The exposed part of the octagonal corner turret base (contexts 709, 710) was overlain by a band of mortar 0.46m wide (context 712). This was the first layer of mortar used to bond the upstanding wall to the foundation; the wall was 0.46m wide or 18 inches, the length of two bricks, and was built on a stepped foundation.

Following the construction of the external walls, the material through which it had been dug appears to have been excavated from the internal area of the chamber tower, possibly for a cellar. A number of brick supporting structures were added to the junction of the walls. The pointing of the bricks was flush, indicating that the supporting buttress was meant to be visible. It is probable that the addition of the cellar and the supporting buttress took place soon after the initial construction, as they were built from the same materials and in the same style. However, it is unclear why there was a need to support the foundations at this point. The construction style and materials are identical to that of the main foundations and so it is likely these supporting structures were added soon after the initial construction.

Two heavily denuded walls were identified in trench 8, possibly forming a building, but later robbing was extensive and the size of the trench also hampered the interpretation of these remains. The walls were made out of re-used roof tile, flint nodules and ironstone fragments bonded with lime mortar. The 1673 sketch by Aubrey shows a structure at this position within the garden, which is annotated as 'Buttery', indicating a possible kitchen building (J Foyle, pers comm). It is probable that the remains revealed in trench 8 represent this building.

The only deposit of significance in trench 5 was the probable remains of a courtyard. It was composed of a thin (0.06m) layer of flints, from which a single sherd of early post-medieval slip-coated earthenware was recovered.

#### LATER FEATURES AND DEPOSITS

The possible foundations of the earlier building and Wayneflete's Great Hall, found in trench 2, appear to have been demolished and much of the masonry removed prior to the construction of an east—west aligned 1m-wide brick foundation, possibly part of a building located adjacent to the river Mole on the early 18th century engraving by Knyff and Kip

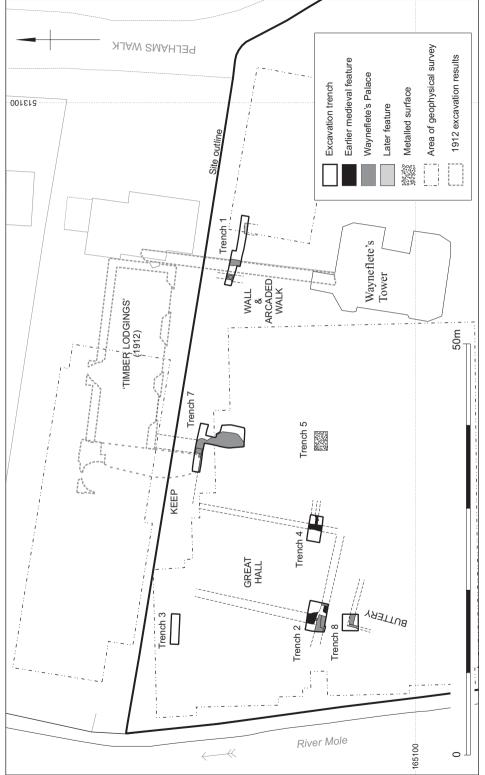


Fig 5 Wayneflete's Tower, Esher. Phase plan in relation to the 1912 excavation results.

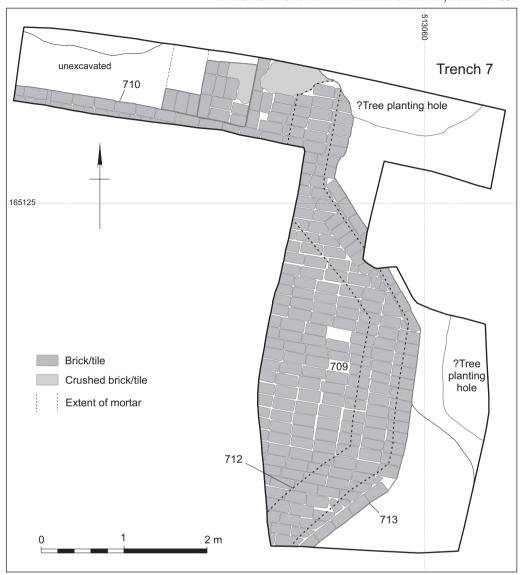


Fig 6 Wayneflete's Tower, Esher. Foundations of the octagonal chamber tower in trench 7.

(Hutchins 2001). In trench 4 two brick walls were recorded abutting the eastern side of the earlier wall, perhaps representing the remains of lean-to buildings.

Possible garden features and tree-planting holes were identified in trenches 1 and 7. The brick structure in trench 1 comprised re-used bricks set in stretcher bond with lime mortar. Although undated, this was presumably contemporary with, or later than, Kent's work when the formal garden was moved from the west to the east of the tower in the early 18th century. Two possible tree-planting holes in trench 7 were both oval in shape and presumably post-date the demolition of the chamber tower, also in the 18th century.

Possible dumps and deposits of demolition material were recorded overlying the archaeological features and deposits or natural substrata in all trenches, probably representing various phases of demolition, construction and finally the landscaping of the present gardens.

### Discussion

The fieldwork at Wayneflete's Tower provided an opportunity to investigate the character, condition and extent of the 15th century palace of the bishops of Winchester. Evidence for earlier activity on the site and later alterations to the buildings were also identified. The previous understanding of the history of Wayneflete's Tower and the *Esher Episcopi* had come from documentary and cartographic evidence as very limited archaeological excavation had taken place.

A greater understanding of the layout of buildings within the bishops' palace has been achieved through the excavation and by re-analysis of the historical documents and cartographic evidence. The dendrochronological survey was able to provide a date of 1462–72 for the construction of the tower.

The geophysical work, in particular the resistance survey, produced a surprisingly clear picture of some of the foundations associated with the palace buildings. The Great Hall and chamber tower were identified in the data and their existence confirmed by the evaluation trenches.

The preservation of the underlying archaeological remains is excellent although later building and re-modelling have masked the earliest structures. The later buildings had been systematically demolished and evidence for the re-use of the building materials was found.

Building on the site began at the beginning or middle of the 13th century by the bishops of Winchester, with work still being carried out towards the end of the 20th century. Prior to the evaluation the possibility of the identification of structures and buildings dating to the 13th and 14th centuries was considered to be slim. However, the remains of wall foundations interpreted as dating to the earliest major phases of building were found in trenches 2 and 4. These foundations may have supported a single-storey timber superstructure.

These foundations had clearly been widened and strengthened, possibly at the beginning of the 14th century when Bishop John Stratford constructed the first manor house in 1331. These foundations possibly formed the south-west corner of the Great Hall of the palace as indicated on Aubrey's 1673 sketch (fig 3). Aubrey's sketch clearly shows the hall slightly to the north of the pathway leading from the gatehouse. It appears that the 14th century hall was incorporated into the 15th century complex of buildings constructed by Bishop Wayneflete.

The episcopate of Bishop Wayneflete (1447–87) saw the greatest period of construction within the *Esher Episcopi* and it is the survival of his 15th century gatehouse that led to this programme of evaluation and survey. One aim of the project had been to locate the extent of the complex of buildings and the boundary of the episcopal manor, but it was clear from analysis of the cartographic evidence that the boundaries of the palace grounds lay well outside the confines of the garden of Wayneflete's Tower. The full extent of the building complex was not revealed although specific buildings were identified.

The only clearly identifiable structure identified was the chamber tower which was revealed in trench 7; its dimensions indicate that it was a structure of a similar size and construction to the existing gatehouse.

The chamber tower had been demolished to the top of the foundation, thus removing all the upstanding walls, but the thickness of these walls was inferred from the remnants of the mortar used to bond them to the foundations. The mortar deposit clearly showed that there was a stepped foundation on which the wall was built and that it was two bricks thick. The foundations for the eastern and southern walls of the chamber tower showed that they had been constructed within trenches excavated into the natural, which had been later removed for the construction of a cellar, and two supporting buttresses.

The information known about the chamber tower prior to the current programme of work came from the Treswell map of 1606 (fig 2) and the annotated sketch plan and elevation by Aubrey in 1673 (fig 3). Both Treswell's and Aubrey's accounts were very useful for approximating positions of buildings within the palace complex, and in showing the size and scale of the complex, but they could not provide detailed information about the structures.

To the east of the chamber tower there was a 'terrace', identified on Aubrey's 1673 sketch, adjoining the 'timber built lodgings' that were potentially identified in the 1912 excavation. The small size of trench 1 limited interpretation of the structures within it, but a north—south corridor was identified between a solid wall and a series of open archways.

The corridor is probably that identified in the 1912 excavation, extending from the north side of the gatehouse, and seen in Aubrey's sketch. The 'terrace' would have provided a sheltered corridor to walk from the gatehouse through to the residential accommodation and the chamber tower which formed the northern perimeter of the palace complex.

The structures that had been identified in trenches 1 and 7 had been well built by master craftsmen. The buildings were of high status and a visible display of wealth and power. Trench 8, however, revealed evidence for the more mundane domestic structures which would have been located within the palace complex. The remains of a poorly built structure were revealed here and interpreted as a possible kitchen, perhaps the structure identified as 'Buttery' on the 1673 sketch.

In trench 2 it was clear that the earlier 13th and 14th century structures had been demolished and covered by later buildings. These later structures were tentatively dated to the period after Wayneflete's episcopate, but this is by no means clear. The later structure in trench 2 may be associated with a building identified on the early 18th century engraving by Knyff and Kip (1707; Hutchins 2001, 28–9; reproduced in Wessex Archaeology 2006, fig 4). This structure is positioned directly in line with the entrance through the gatehouse and appears to partially overhang the edge of the river, perhaps as some kind of garden feature.

One of the most debated issues about Wayneflete's palace has been the date at which work began. The consensus, until now, had been that building began during the period 1475–80. In 1461 the man believed to have been the master mason, John Cowper, had just finished work for Wayneflete at Eton, and he is recorded next in Winchester in 1466–7, before going on to work on other projects for the bishop. However the period 1461–6 is unaccounted for. The felling date range of 1462–72 for the timbers in Wayneflete's Tower would accord well with the period for which there are no records of John Cowper's activities.

Analysis of the Winchester pipe rolls revealed that no building expenses were accounted for during the period Michaelmas 1464 to Michaelmas 1467. Instead they were accounted for by the bishop's cofferer; in other words, the keeper of the bishop's own coffer was dealing with all building work during this period, and therefore the bishop himself was financing some significant work at Esher (Worthington & Miles 2005, 4). It would therefore appear that the work began during a time of great upheaval following the outbreak of the Wars of the Roses in 1458 and Wayneflete's resignation as Chancellor. Following the coronation of Edward IV, Wayneflete was freed from his governmental duties and was therefore able to concentrate his time and effort on other business, and the construction of the palace at Esher appears to have occurred at this time.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The fieldwork and post-excavation analysis were commissioned and funded by Videotext Communications Ltd. Thanks are also due to Penny Rainbow and family, Robert Woods, and Colin and Suzanne Roberts for allowing access to Wayneflete's Tower and adjacent properties. The geophysical survey was undertaken by John Gater, Jimmy Adcock and Emma Wood (GSB Prospection) and the field survey was undertaken by Henry Chapman (University of Hull). Mick Aston (University of Bristol) devised the excavation strategy. The on-site recording was co-ordinated by Steve Thompson, assisted by Naomi Hall (Wessex Archaeology).

The excavations were undertaken by *Time Team*'s retained archaeologists, Phil Harding (Wessex Archaeology), Raksha Dave, Kerry Ely, Matt Williams, Ian Powlesland and Brigid Gallagher, with help from Tracey Smith, Helene McNeill, Steve Dyer, Joyce Herve, Emma

Corke, Mark Perks and David Williams. On-site finds and pottery identification was undertaken by Faye Simpson and on-site building interpretations by Dr Jonathan Foyle. Michael Worthington and Daniel Miles undertook the dendrochronological analysis. Edward Roberts examined the pipe rolls.

The report was edited by Philippa Bradley; Lorraine Mepham and Julie Gardiner are thanked for their comments on an earlier draft. The illustrations were drawn by Elizabeth James. Adrian James (Society of Antiquaries of London) is thanked for permission to reproduce the 1912 excavation plan and Tricia Buckingham (The Bodleian Library, Oxford) is thanked for permission to reproduce Aubrey's 1673 sketch. Hugh Alexander of the National Archives, Kew is thanked for permission to reproduce the 1606 Treswell map. Thanks are also due to the anonymous referee for comments on an earlier draft of this report.

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