

The New Castles of Henry de Blois as Bishop of Winchester: The Case against Farnham, Surrey

By NICHOLAS RIALL

*FARNHAM CASTLE, like other castles of the bishops of Winchester, has traditionally been dated to the period of the Anarchy, a tradition that is based upon the documentary evidence and the limited excavation by Dr M. W. Thompson within the area of the castle keep. This view is challenged on the grounds of historiographical problems with the documentary evidence, the archaeological examination of other de Blois castles which suggest construction before his episcopate, and finally because it is chronologically incompatible with the soil mechanics of the motte.*¹

In 1960 Dr M. W. Thompson published the results of his excavation on the keep of Farnham castle.² He suggested that around 1138 Bishop Henry de Blois, Bishop of Winchester 1129–71, ordered the construction of a castle with a square keep composed of a tower buried within a mound on top of which was a tower-keep. This tower-keep, suggests Thompson, was slighted in 1155 leaving only the masonry within the mound to provide the surround for a substantial well, and was replaced later in the 12th century with a shell keep built around the earlier mound (Figs. 1–2). This shell keep, much re-faced and somewhat altered, survives today and is now a Guardianship Monument managed by English Heritage.

Historical and archaeological studies since 1960 have shed more light on Bishop Henry's building activities; these suggest that Thompson's work bears a different interpretation to that published. This paper draws upon this recent research, as well as a survey of the keep by a civil engineer, to present a fresh interpretation of Henry de Blois' castle at Farnham.

THE DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

The principal reason for dating the first phase of Farnham castle to the period of the Anarchy is a reference to it by the Winchester Annalist in 1138. The annal is

¹ This paper is, in part, taken from the author's unpublished B.A. dissertation which examined the life and building works of Bishop Henry de Blois. An overview of Bishop Henry's building works is given in N. Riall, *Henry of Blois, Bishop of Winchester: A Patron of the Twelfth-century Renaissance* (Winchester, 1994).

² M. W. Thompson, 'Recent excavations in the keep of Farnham Castle, Surrey', *Medieval Archaeol.*, 4 (1960), 81–94.

Rights have not yet been
granted to use this im-
age in electronic media.
Please refer to printed
article.

FIG. 1

Farnham castle. Aerial view from the east of the castle buildings showing the concrete cap which now covers the raft and well in the centre of the shell-keep. Reproduced courtesy of English Heritage photo library (K95 1247). © *Slyscan Balloon Photography*.

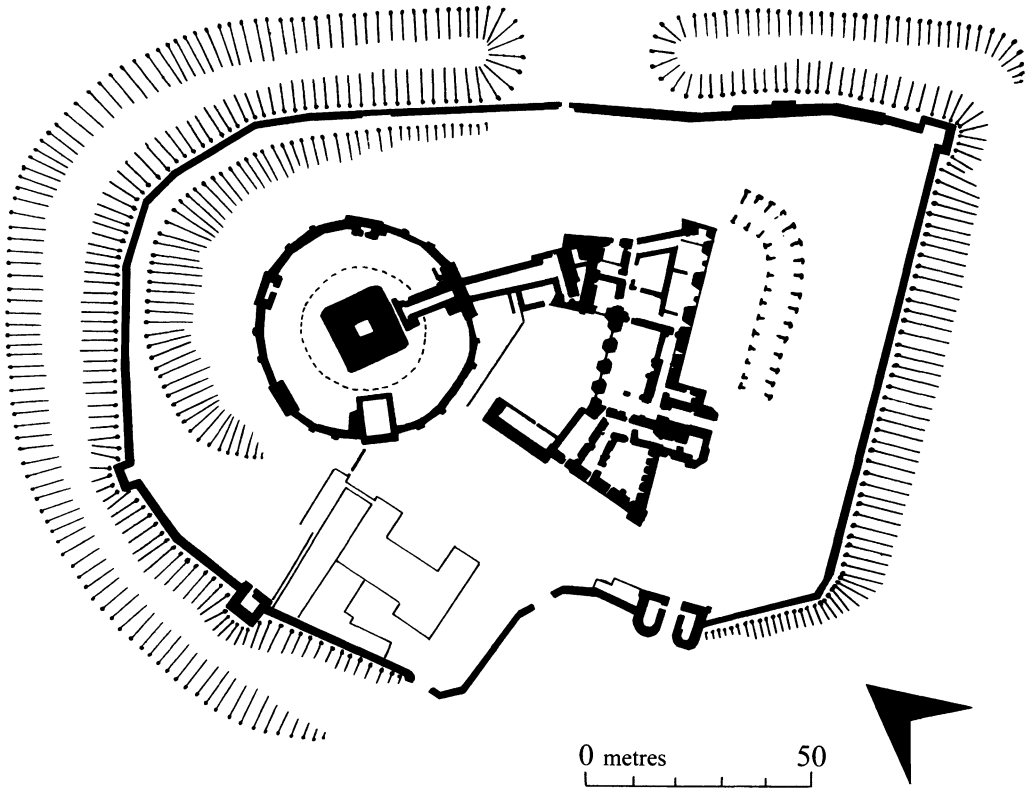


FIG. 2

General plan of Farnham castle showing the standing buildings within a curtain wall set upon the bank of the surrounding ringwork. The line of the probable inner bailey ditch is shown around the south-east corner of the main south range.

to be found in the *Annales de Monasterii de Wintonia*, hereafter referred to as the 1138 Annal.³ The castle next appears, by name, in documents from 1208/9 onwards: of these the principal materials are a series of manorial accounts, the Pipe Rolls of the Bishops of Winchester, evidence from which will be considered below. Farnham castle is not categorically referred to by any of the contemporary chroniclers of the 12th century.

Thompson takes the date of 1138, as supplied by the Winchester annalist, to be the closely approximate date for the construction of the keep complex at Farnham. From the documentary and archaeological evidence, he concluded: 'it is perhaps a fair assumption that this (1138) is . . . an initial date for Henry'.⁴ Examination of the 1138 Annal together with archaeological evidence from other de Blois sites challenges Thompson's dating.

The 1138 Annal forms part of the B variant of the *Annales de Monasterii de Wintonia*. These *Annales* were probably written by Richard of Devizes towards the

³ *Annales Monastici in Annales de Monasterii de Wintonia*, Vol. II, ed. H. R. Luard (London, 1865).

⁴ Thompson, *op. cit.* in note 2, 87, note 13.

end of the 12th century; perhaps in the 1190s.⁵ The *Annales* are not, in Appleby's opinion, strictly contemporary with the events they describe but are almost certainly based on material contained in the works of other, earlier, annalists and chroniclers; for example William of Malmesbury's *Historia Novella*. The *Annales* may also include evidence taken from documents held by the Bishop of Winchester and by the monks of St Swithun's, Winchester, documents that have long since disappeared. It is Appleby's belief that the information given in the *Annales* is reasonably accurate but that there are a number of minor errors. The 1138 Annal reads as follows:

*Hoc anno fecit Henricus episcopus aedificare domum quasi palatium cum turri fortissima in Wintonia: castellum de Merdona et de Fernham et de Wautham et de Duntona et de Tanton. Rogerius Saresberiensis episcopus castellum Saresberiensis, Siresburne, Divisense, et Malmesberiae; comes Gloucestriae firmavit Gloucestriam, Bathoniam, Bristollum, Dorcestriam, Exoniam, Wimbornam, Corfe et Wareham; Brianus Wallingfordia et Oxoniam; Alexander episcopus Lincolniam; Johannes Marescallus Merlebergham et Lutergarsale; Gaufridus de Magnavilla turrim Lundoniae et Roucestriam. Non fuit alicujus meriti vel momentii in Anglia qui non faceret aut inforciat munitionem in Anglia.*⁶

In this year Bishop Henry built a palatial house in Winchester with a very strong [or forbidding] tower;⁷ and also the castles at Merdon, Farnham, Waltham, Downton, and Taunton. Bishop Roger of Salisbury built castles at Salisbury (Old Sarum), Sherborne, Devizes and Malmesbury; the Earl of Gloucester strengthened the castles at Gloucester, Bath, Bristol, Dorchester, Exeter, Wimbourne,⁸ Corfe and Wareham; Brian [fitzCount] those at Oxford and Wallingford; Bishop Alexander that at Lincoln; John Marshall [fitzGilbert] those at Marlborough and Ludgershall; Geoffrey de Mandeville strengthened the Tower of London and Rochester. And there was no one of any worth or influence in England who did not either build or enforce the defence of their castles.

Commenting on the dating of the de Blois castles, Thompson considered that: 'Only at two of these six castles, Taunton and Farnham, has it been suggested that remains earlier than Henry de Blois exist on the site. In the light of the excavations at Farnham it is unnecessary to assume an 11th century motte-and-bailey there.'⁹ This echoes a view expressed by R. B. Brown who, in his study of castles of the second half of the 12th century, suggested that the inclusion of Farnham in the 1138 Annal did not of necessity mean the castle was *newly* built in 1138.¹⁰ He was followed by Cathcart King who opined that since the 1138 Annal mentioned five other castles of the Bishop of Winchester being built at the same time then it was likely that Farnham was older than this.¹¹ King's explanation seems improbable when it is remembered that Henry de Blois was, from 1129, building on a

⁵ J. T. Appleby, 'Richard of Devizes and the Annals of Winchester', *Bull. Inst. Hist. Res.*, 30 (1963), 70–7. See also, J. Gillingham, 'Civilizing the English?', *Hist. Res.*, 74 (2001), 17–43, esp. p. 42 and note.

⁶ Luard, *op. cit.* in note 3, 51.

⁷ M. Biddle (ed.), *Winchester Studies I* (Oxford, 1976), 297–9 and 325–6, suggests that the Winchester annalist recorded the construction of two separate buildings: the palace complex at Wolvesey and a military structure elsewhere, perhaps on the site of the royal palace which was held by Bishop Henry during much of King Stephen's reign.

⁸ This is the only known documentary reference to a castle at Wimbourne. Nothing has ever been seen on the ground to suggest there was a castle here. The version of this text contained in Cotton MS Domitian Axxiii was checked by Miss P. J. Porter of the British Library who confirms that Luard's transcription was accurate.

⁹ Thompson, *op. cit.* in note 2, 87.

¹⁰ R. A. Brown, 'A list of castles, 1154–1216', *Eng. Hist. Rev.*, 74 (1959), 249–80, at p. 251.

¹¹ D. J. Cathcart King, *Castellarium Anglicanum* (Millwood NY, 1983), 465.

prodigious scale all across the episcopal estates: a palace at Southwark, a moated manor house at Bishop's Sutton (Hampshire) and another at Witney (Oxon.), alongside building works, from 1126, on his abbey at Glastonbury where also he is considered to have fortified his abbot's lodgings.¹²

Insofar as Thompson's case depends on parallels with others of de Blois' castles, they are no longer tenable. It is clear from Rigold's work at Bishop's Waltham palace,¹³ Biddle's work at Wolvesey palace, Winchester,¹⁴ together with Durham and Allen's work on the palace site at Witney,¹⁵ that the documentary evidence is misleading. Rigold, Biddle and Durham all place the initial construction phases of their sites within the episcopate of William Giffard, Bishop of Winchester 1100–29, on the basis of archaeological and architectural evidence. The dating of the construction sequence at Taunton has been studied by Warwick Rodwell who commented that it is almost impossible to be certain what was happening at Taunton castle other than within broadly defined date-brackets.¹⁶ Durham and Allen, reporting on the excavations at Witney palace in Oxfordshire, which was previously only known from 13th-century documentation, place the initial construction phase of the palace in Bishop Giffard's episcopate and date its fortification to the period 1120–40. Whilst Thompson's excavations produced no archaeological evidence either to support or to refute the statement of the Winchester annalist, it is clear from the evidence found at other sites of the de Blois group that the Winchester annalist's note cannot be taken at its face value and the text of the 1138 Annal should be carefully examined before it is used as substantive evidence.

The terminology of the 1138 Annal is potentially misleading and two words in particular require consideration here: *aedificare* and *castellum*. Stenton noted that both phrases were utilised rather loosely and are ambiguous in meaning.¹⁷ Both words were probably employed as 'jargon' phrases the precise meaning of which is now lost to us. *Aedificare* may thus, in Stenton's view, be taken to mean one of the following: the construction of a new building on a new site; the addition of a new structure to an already existing complex; or the substantial repair of a neglected building. *Castellum* is similarly imprecise in meaning and may refer to either a stone-built castle or one of timber, and in either material the site may be of any type. It may however be significant that of the 25 castles mentioned in the full text of the 1138 Annal only four cannot be shown to have had a stone-built keep of some type by the mid-12th century; all four of those sites have in fact been damaged

¹² D. F. Renn, *Norman Castles in Britain* (London, 1973), 355; see also, Biddle, op. cit. in note 7, 326, noting Adam of Domerham's comment in his chronicle, *Historia Glastonberiensis*, that Bishop Henry built a house that resembled a castle.

¹³ Stuart Rigold's excavations at Bishop's Waltham palace remain unpublished apart from his annual summary notes published in *Medieval Archaeology* as follows: (1957), 54; (1958), 194; (1961), 317; (1962/63), 319; and (1964), 248. I am most grateful to Dr Jane Geddes for discussing Rigold's excavations notes and archive with me.

¹⁴ M. Biddle, 'Wolvesey: the *domus quasi palatium* of Henry of Blois in Winchester', 28–36 in A. J. Taylor (ed.), *Chateau Gaillard*, Vol. 3 (Chichester, 1969). See also idem, op. cit. in note 7, 323–8, and *Wolvesey: The Old Bishops Palace, Winchester* (Chichester, 1986).

¹⁵ B. Durham, *Witney Palace* (Oxford, 1985); T. Allen with J. Hiller, *The Excavation of a Medieval Manor House of the Bishops of Winchester at Mount House, Witney, Oxfordshire, 1984–92* (Oxford, 2002).

¹⁶ Pers. comm. See also P. Leach, *The Archaeology of Taunton* (Taunton, 1984), 11–26.

¹⁷ F. Stenton, *The First Century of English Feudalism 1066–1166* (Oxford, 1961).

to a point where it is not now possible to obtain the evidence (i.e. Bath, Downton, Malmesbury and Wimborne).

There are therefore inherent dangers in accepting a literal translation of the 1138 Annal. Along with the notation of Bishop Henry's castles, the text of the annal records the refurbishment of castles across southern England. 1138 was the year in which the full-scale warfare of the Anarchy burst out following Roger of Gloucester's formal declaration of defiance to King Stephen and it is therefore perhaps no coincidence that the 1138 Annal is remarkably similar in tone and content to entries for 1138 in the Chronicle of Henry of Huntingdon and in that of Roger of Wendover, both of whom were writing at the time that these events took place.¹⁸ These entries convey an atmosphere of impending warfare by referring to the abnormal amount of castle-work being undertaken during the year; these entries were echoed by the Winchester annalist who, writing a history of his own monastery, placed Bishop Henry's castles at the head of his list thereby placing local affairs in the context of national events.

The 1138 Annal should perhaps be taken only as a potentially useful reference point for the existence of a castle of unknown form at Farnham by 1138. The discovery of Witney palace, with its Anarchy-period fortifications, makes it clear that the 1138 Annal is by no means necessarily a complete list of Bishop Henry's castles, fortified palaces and manor houses. It would seem very likely that Bishop Henry would have built a fortified manor house at Bishop's Sutton, Hampshire, rather than an undefended manor house. Bishop Henry obtained the manor in 1136, swapping it with his brother King Stephen for the manor of Steeple Morden (Cambs.).¹⁹ This suggests again that the annal provides a not wholly reliable account, one which should not be invoked to provide a critical date — the primary construction date for Farnham castle as an entire complex — or, of necessity, the date for any re-construction of major significance. Additionally, it is possible to show that there are some other errors and surprising omissions in the text of the 1138 Annal.

Exeter castle was taken by King Stephen in 1136 (from Baldwin de Redvers) and it is surely unlikely that Robert of Gloucester was holding, and strengthening, Exeter castle in 1138.²⁰ Robert of Gloucester cannot have held Bath either. The *Gesta Stephani* reveals that in 1138 Bath was held by Robert of Lewes, Bishop of Bath 1136–66, and that he was being besieged by Geoffrey Talbot and Gilbert de Lacy who both supported the Empress Matilda.²¹ King Stephen broke the siege and the garrison left at Bath is recorded as strengthening the town defences.²² Curiously absent are the castles at Guildford and Windsor, the major castles in

¹⁸ *The Chronicle of Henry of Huntingdon*, ed. and trans. A. M. Forester (London, 1909), 267; *Roger of Wendover's Flowers of History*, ed. and trans. J. A. Giles (London, 1892), 487. Both chronicles, like William of Malmesbury's *Historia Novella* and the anonymous *Gesta Stephani*, were written during the reign of King Stephen, 1135–54. The value and authenticity of these chronicles is discussed by A. Gransden, *Historical Writing in England c.550–c.1307* (London, 1974), esp. 166–218.

¹⁹ R. H. C. Davis (ed.), *Facsimiles of Original Charters and Writs of King Stephen, the Empress Matilda and Dukes Geoffrey and Henry, 1135–1154* (Regesta regum anglo-normannorum, 1066–1154, Vol. 4, Oxford, 1969), Charter 944.

²⁰ *Gesta Stephani*, ed. and trans. K. R. Potter (Oxford, 1976), caps. 16–20.

²¹ *Ibid.*, cap. 28. Robert of Lewes may well have been the author of the *Gesta Stephani*: see Potter, op. cit. note 13, xviii–xxxviii.

²² *Ibid.*, cap. 33.

Sussex and Kent (for example Arundel, Pevensey, Dover and Canterbury), as well as the other castle-palaces of Bishop Alexander of Lincoln (Banbury, Newark and Sleaford).

Whatever the nature of the Anarchy castle at Farnham, it had been replaced by the existing shell-keep (Thompson's Phase 3) before 1208–9, when it is recorded, identifiably as this turreted shell-keep. There is never any mention of a central tower-keep in the Pipe Rolls of the Bishop of Winchester. These Pipe Rolls contain much evidence for later periods of activity, both refurbishment and construction, at Farnham castle. They survive, with occasional gaps, from 1208–9 until late in the post-medieval period. The shell-keep almost certainly replaced the earlier tower-keep (Thompson's Phase 1) as the major fortified element of the castle; the tower-keep having probably been slighted in 1155 on the orders of King Henry II following Bishop Henry's 'flight' or exile to the monastery of Cluny in France.²³ It is a curious aspect of this excavation that no evidence for a demolition phase was found. While any potential stonework would have been re-used in later building works, such as the creation of the shell-keep walls, the copious quantities of mortar cleaned from this stone should have left some trace in the motte's stratigraphy. No such evidence was found. Cathcart King claims that Farnham was 'violently slighted' but produced no evidence to support this assertion.²⁴

The contemporary chronicles are virtually silent concerning this incident. Bishop Henry was, presumably, involved in a quarrel with the king of sufficiently serious proportions to warrant his fleeing the country. King Henry II would have seized the opportunity to demolish the fortifications on the de Blois sites in line with his policy of removing the spectacular numbers of adulterine castles which had been erected during the Anarchy years. Although Farnham is not mentioned by name, contemporary chroniclers record the demolition of, variously, all, or six, or three, of the de Blois castles.²⁵ The archaeological evidence, and the date given to it, for this 'slighting' of the de Blois castle-palaces at Bishop's Waltham,²⁶ and Witney palace²⁷ is not inconsistent with a date of 1155; no evidence for this demolition phase was recovered during the excavations of Wolvesey. There is no absolute archaeological evidence from Farnham castle to suggest the castle was slighted in 1155, Thompson's excavation revealing only the presence of a probable square keep which had, by the end of the 12th century, been replaced by the shell-keep. The later 12th-century sequence is phased and dated solely on the documentary evidence.

The Pipe Rolls of the Bishops of Winchester provide information which may indicate an alternative explanation for part of the structures found within the shell-keep by Thompson; this material will be considered below.

²³ *Pipe Roll 2 Henry II*, p. 54, records the expenditure of £6 15 on the demolition of the bishop's castles in Hampshire (Bishop's Waltham, Merdon and Wolvesey).

²⁴ Cathcart King, *op. cit.* in note 11.

²⁵ See Biddle, *op. cit.* note 14.

²⁶ Rigold, *op. cit.* in note 13 (1962/63), 319.

²⁷ Durham, *op. cit.* in note 15, 8.

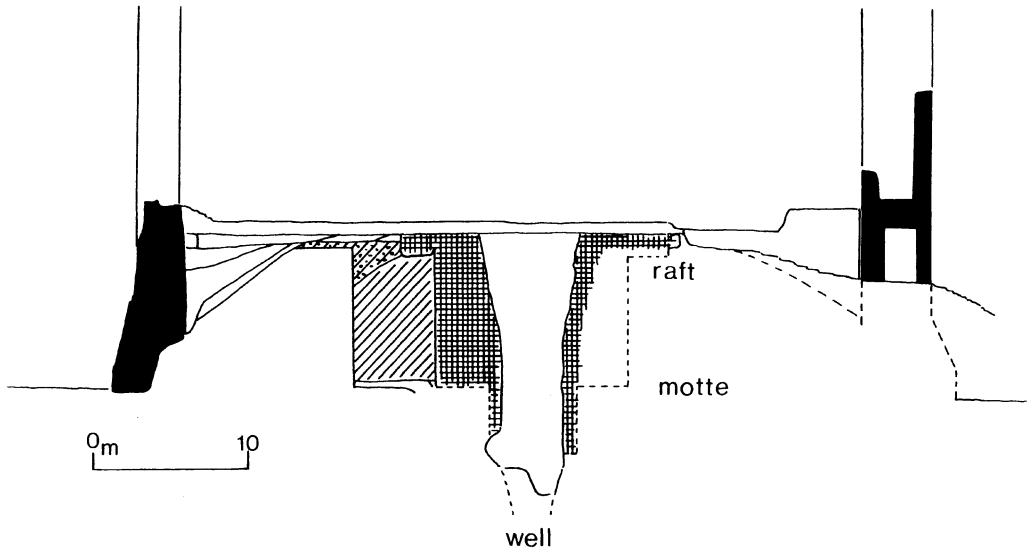


FIG. 3

Farnham castle: section through the motte (after Thompson, *op. cit.* in note 2).

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

The castle at Farnham consists of a triangular group of buildings, with the keep complex at its apex, contained within a substantial ringwork comprising a wide and deep ditch with an internal bank which also incorporates a stone curtain wall and interval towers (Figs. 1–2). No archaeological excavations have been undertaken outside the keep although a resistivity survey in the area south of the bailey buildings has revealed the presence of a ditch c. 8 m wide.²⁸ The ringwork must have been in existence before 1208–9, as there is no record in the Pipe Rolls of this being created.

Thompson proposed the following construction sequence for the earlier phases of the keep complex at Farnham castle:²⁹

Phase 1 (c. 1138)

Construction of the foundation-tower, as it is termed by Thompson (Fig. 3) was followed by its burial within a flat-topped conical mound. On top of the mound, and incorporating the foundation-tower, was laid a flange — a mass of mortar and rubble — above which rose a tower-keep constructed in either timber or stone. All three elements of this construction were considered by Thompson to be contemporary. The perceived purpose of this unusual construction was to provide an ‘instant’ square keep protected by and sitting upon a motte. Thompson

²⁸ I am grateful to David and Audrey Graham for this information; see also, ‘Archaeology in Surrey 1987’, *Surrey Archaeol. Coll.*, 79 (1989), 182 and ground plan on p. 184.

²⁹ Thompson, *op. cit.* in note 2, 90–1.

found no evidence to show that the mound was built earlier than the foundation-tower: no waste building materials were found outside the foundation-tower on the original ground surface and the mound materials lay directly against the external, rendered face of the foundation-tower.

Phase 2 (1155)

Bishop Henry fled to Cluny and Farnham castle was probably slighted.

Phase 3 (c. 1160–1208)

Sometime within this period the mound and remains of the tower-keep were enclosed within a turreted shell-keep.

This paper is mainly concerned with the Phase 1 period of construction but it is worth noting at the outset that any discussion of the archaeology at Farnham castle keep is based upon a single trench. This is a very small base from which to extrapolate conclusions about the construction of this structure.

At this writer's request the late Mr Alister Brown, a civil engineer, kindly examined the structure of the keep complex, both on the ground and through the published evidence.³⁰ In Brown's view the critical elements in the construction sequence is the evidence presented by the flange and the lack of mound-settlement. Thompson was convinced that the flange (Fig. 3) was laid on top of the newly constructed mound and across the top of a newly constructed foundation-tower.³¹ Thompson suggested that this method of construction was possible through the medieval builders having buried the foundation-tower, 'in a conical mound of carefully selected and beaten marl, beaten almost to the consistency of concrete'.³²

Thompson noted that this marl was so hard that it had to be excavated with a pick-axe.³³ The same geological material was encountered by the present writer during the excavations at Borelli Yard, Farnham, where it formed the principal material filling the town ditch.³⁴ Here also the ground was so hard that it had to be excavated with a pick-axe but this cannot be the result of its having been deliberately compacted in the medieval period. Commenting on this aspect of the construction Brown stated that it is very difficult to compact and consolidate marls, even with the use of modern machinery, and having done so it would remain hazardous to raise a substantial structure upon the mound. He was of the opinion that the medieval builders were most unlikely to have had the technical knowledge and equipment to be able to consolidate a mass of material in the form of a mound composed of marls. Brown explained that the main difficulty lay in extracting either the air, if the marl was dry, or the water if wet marl was employed. In either case a large percentage of the mound would have been formed of either water or

³⁰ Mr Brown was the managing director of a civil engineering firm based in Glasgow and had considerable experience in building roads and railways, specialising in embankments and bridging work.

³¹ Thompson, *op. cit.* in note 2, 84.

³² M. W. Thompson, 'Excavations in Farnham Castle Keep, Surrey, England, 1958–60', *Chateau Gaillard*, 2 (Cologne, 1967), 100–5.

³³ Thompson, *op. cit.* note in 2, 84.

³⁴ N. Riall, 'Excavations at Borelli Yard, Farnham: the town ditch', *Surrey Archaeol. Coll.*, 85 (1998), 120–32.

air which, over a period of time, would have been released from the mound during the process of settlement. In terms of pure soil mechanics, therefore, the sequence proposed by Thompson for the Phase 1 construction of the keep ought to be disputed. Brown considered that a period of at least 60 years, preferably more, would have had to elapse before any substantial structure could be built using the mound as a foundation.

Thompson also considered that the decision to add the flange must have been taken at the time the mound was begun, a theory he supports with the evidence of the concrete-like nature of the mound make-up. This interpretation is very suspect. The flange was mostly integrated with the foundation-tower, apart from a small space leading upwards from the base of the flange. Unlike the foundation-tower, Thompson noted, the flange was very roughly built of rubble blocks set in a matrix of yellow mortar. This difference in construction technique, together with the lack of settlement (there are no cracks in the flange),³⁵ suggests that the flange was a later addition and was constructed after the tower-keep had been taken down.

The relationship of the keep structure above the mound to Thompson's flange must now be considered. Thompson was of the opinion that the purpose of adding the flange was to increase the floor area of the keep rising above it and allow the addition of a battered base rising part way up the exterior of the tower-keep. This suggestion implies an *ad hoc* nature to the construction of the keep at Farnham, ignores the practical problems of such a construction, and fails to examine the need for the employment of such a method. As the base of the tower was already buried deep within a mound of not inconsiderable dimensions it seems unlikely that further measures were necessary to protect the keep from siege weapons. It is also likely that the keep and mound lay within the massive bank-and-ditch ringwork defences that still surround the castle (see Fig. 1); these, however, have not been dated.

Attention was drawn by Brown to the use of soft stone, mostly malmstone quarried in Bentley a few miles west of Farnham, as a building material in the foundation-tower. This, he suggested, might strengthen the case for arguing that the mound preceded the construction of the foundation-tower unless, as Thompson postulates, it had been intended from the first to bury the foundation-tower within a mound as a single phase of building activity.

This use of soft stone needs to be carefully examined in a wider context. Henry de Blois had at least seven, perhaps more, castles under construction at the same time and these formed only a part of his entire building programme. Only at Farnham was soft stone utilised in a structure of critical importance in a complex such as this. The decision to build in such materials can hardly have been a matter of economy, as Bishop Henry evidently had more than sufficient wealth at his disposal to build in whatever materials he chose. That said, there is a case for suggesting that local stone would have been used whenever possible and imported stone would have been reserved for 'face work', architectural mouldings and ornamentation. The use of soft stone in the foundation-tower would tend to favour Thompson's interpretation which places its construction in the same phase as the

³⁵ Thompson, *op. cit.* in note 2, 84, noted that 'nowhere has the flange broken free from the original foundation'.

mound. However, Thompson also noted that he was unable to find any evidence for doorways or window arches in the walls of the foundation-tower. The presence of these would have meant that the foundation-tower pre-dated the mound. This evidence must also be treated with caution as it is clear from the Pipe Roll evidence that the foundation-tower was utilised as a well throughout the remainder of the medieval period and the internal faces of the foundation-tower were re-lined from time to time: an activity which would have destroyed any potential evidence of windows or doorways.

Thompson's excavation also revealed that the external face of the foundation-tower had been rendered in a mortar similar to that used in its construction. He suggested that this rendering may have been applied as a method of 'waterproofing' the tower before it was buried within the mound.³⁶ The same feature was found at Witney palace but was interpreted as part of the pre-de Blois country-house period.³⁷ The relevance of this will be discussed below.

DISCUSSION

Studies of Henry de Blois, Bishop of Winchester 1129–71 and abbot of Glastonbury 1126–71, are largely restricted to his clerical and political career.³⁸ Whilst a considerable volume of research and excavation has been conducted upon his building works, very little of this has come into print and is mostly in the form of interim reports, Farnham, of course, being one exception. It is now clear from Rigold's excavations at Bishop's Waltham, Biddle's work at Wolvesey, and Durham and Allen's work at Witney, together with observations made upon the standing structures remaining elsewhere, that Bishop Henry was an enthusiastic builder of castles, palaces and manor houses as well as of ecclesiastical buildings. In these structures was demonstrated his interest in architecture and art. Bishop Henry was a man of fashion, an innovator who was not content to accept only the hard, stark lines of pure Romanesque architecture. He was a lover of embellishment and ornament, a point that is heavily underlined by Biddle's findings at Wolvesey palace and Durham's at Witney, and one that is yet more clearly seen in Bishop Henry's patronage of artists such as those who produced the Winchester Bible. Biddle sees the concept, architecture, ornamentation and scale of Wolvesey palace as a mirror of the man who conceived it.³⁹ Farnham is clearly not to be compared to Wolvesey nor does Farnham bear comparison with other of the de Blois buildings.

Within the de Blois group of buildings Farnham is something of an anachronism. The site contains elements which are not present at other de Blois sites, insofar as it is possible to be certain of this, and structures which were, by Bishop Henry's day, distinctly archaic. Farnham is essentially a motte-and-bailey

³⁶ Thompson, *op. cit.* in note 2, 83.

³⁷ Durham, *op. cit.* in note 15, 8.

³⁸ Most notably, L. Voss, *Heinrich von Blois, Bischof von Winchester* (Berlin, 1932); D. Knowles, *The Monastic Order in Britain* (Cambridge, 1950); D. Knowles, *Saints and Scholars: Twenty Five Medieval Portraits* (Cambridge, 1963); H. A. Cronne, *The Reign of Stephen: Anarchy in England* (London, 1970).

³⁹ Biddle, *op. cit.* in note 14, 31.

complex lying within an, undated but probably 12th-century, ringwork. The motte, with its keep, lies at the apex of a group of buildings, the base of which is formed by the hall with a gatehouse, now covered by the 15th-century, brick Fox's tower, and kitchen to the west. Only Farnham presents this style of layout and construction although it is impossible to be certain of the original layout at Downton, where extensive 19th-century landscaping has considerably damaged the site. All the remaining de Blois sites present evidence of rectilinear layouts focused around a courtyard that follow the early 12th-century designs employed by Roger de Caen, Bishop of Salisbury, at Sherborne and Old Sarum.⁴⁰ The guiding principle to these designs appears to be the provision of country-house grandeur and luxury combined with defensive arrangements. Both Roger de Caen and, following in his footsteps, Henry de Blois were creating architectural settings which matched their high position and social status in the governance of both the realm and their episcopates. Farnham was not such a stage for the conduct of the affairs of state, but was more a country house that appears to have evolved into a castle-palace during the 12th century; but not achieving its full grandeur until the late 13th–early 14th century.

The keep complex at Farnham forms an isolated complex which is comparable to many early motte-and-bailey sites; the recent discovery of a possible bailey ditch enclosing the early bailey structures enhances this comparison.⁴¹ Apart from a possible motte at Taunton, which has not been precisely dated but is likely to be of 11th-century date, Farnham is the only de Blois site which contains a motte. The more typical layout at both the de Caen and de Blois sites was a major block, tower-keep or chamber-block/solar-tower, as, for example, at Sherborne, Bishop's Waltham, Witney and Wolvesey. This block stood at one end of, or at the angle between, ranges of buildings which included the hall. None of these chamber-blocks or tower-keeps are comparable to the contemporary castle-keeps at Guildford, Portchester or Oxford, quite apart from the more massive constructions like that at Corfe. This further emphasises the differences between these ecclesiastical palaces and the more military-style castles of the same period. This is not to say that the de Blois sites were any the less defensible, as Wolvesey was successfully defended in 1141.

All of the de Blois hall ranges appear to have been built in stone and timber from the beginning, except Farnham which may have been a timber construction, the posts of which are now contained in stone walling. Unlike the layouts at Wolvesey, Bishop's Waltham and Taunton, the arrangement of the buildings at Farnham is claustrophobic and untidy. The location of the chapel at Farnham, in the south-west angle of the bailey, clearly shows this seemingly unplanned and unaligned arrangement. Elsewhere the chapel either forms an integrated, planned element of the layout, as at Wolvesey and Witney, or is placed in a more open situation as at Bishop's Waltham. The juxtaposition of hall and bishop's camera at Farnham is similarly unparalleled. Only in the surviving portion of the south-facing

⁴⁰ R. A. Stalley, 'A 12th century patron of architecture: a study of the buildings erected by Roger, Bishop of Salisbury 1102–1139', *J. British Archaeol. Assoc.*, 34 (1971), 62–83.

⁴¹ P. D. Brooks and A. Graham, *Farnham Castle, the Forgotten Years* (Farnham, 1985), esp. fig. 1.

wall of the hall at Farnham is any trace of the architectural grandeur which might be expected of a de Blois site to be found. Here, elaborate blind arcading and round-headed windows with ornamental decoration were constructed in imported stone, possibly Caen stone. This wall however almost certainly belongs to the mid- to late 12th century.

The possibility of there having been a timber 'donjon' on top of the motte on the lines of those depicted in the Bayeux Tapestry, which might conceivably have preceded the masonry keep, was examined by Thompson.⁴² But, having failed to find any trace of timber settings in the mound top, Thompson concluded that there had not been a timber phase and that the foundation-tower with its mound represented the primary construction sequence. Yet it is possible, however, that the more usual fortification sequence of motte with donjon being replaced by a masonry keep is not applicable to episcopal manor-house/palace sites such as Farnham.

Farnham was included amongst the possessions of the Bishop of Winchester in the Domesday Survey and it is reasonably clear from the later history of the manor that Farnham was even then an important manor, possibly with the status of 'caput' as early as the mid- or late 12th century. This was certainly the case in the early 13th century. It is then surprising that no tentative suggestion has been made for the existence of a substantial manor house at Farnham from the 11th century and into the 12th. The comparisons drawn between Farnham and other sites of the de Blois group discussed above indicate that Farnham is not typical of the style favoured by Bishop Henry; the indications point to Farnham having already been established before Bishop Henry's episcopate. Following this hypothesis it is possible to re-interpret another segment of Thompson's excavation evidence.

Thompson found no evidence for a foundation trench cut through the motte to enable the construction of the foundation-tower. He also found that the exterior face of the foundation-tower had been rendered in the same mortar as that used in the construction of the foundation-tower. He interpreted this as showing that the rendering was applied as a method of waterproofing the newly built tower which was soon to be buried within a mound.

The interpretation put forward by Durham for the construction sequence of the palace at Witney may usefully be examined in connection with Farnham.⁴³ Durham was of the opinion that at Witney there had been a pre-Anarchy period undefended palace, or large country house, which was fortified in the 1130s; he was convinced that Witney, like the palace at Wolvesey, had been begun before Bishop Henry's episcopate. Of particular interest is Durham's discovery that substantial portions of the palace structure were originally rendered in mortar and were later embanked. Durham describes this embankment as military works designed to protect the base of the tower at Witney and as a measure comparable with contemporary works at Ascot D'Oilly castle in Oxfordshire, Lydford in Devon and Castle Acre in Norfolk. The possibility that a country-house phase was present

⁴² Thompson, *op. cit.* in note 2, 84-5.

⁴³ Durham, *op. cit.* in note 15, 7-8.

at Farnham prior to Bishop Henry's episcopate cannot now be dismissed. It is a possibility that Thompson's foundation-tower was, like Witney palace, unprotected and that the mound at Farnham was added in the 1130s to provide military defences. Clearly the motte at Farnham was a secondary feature, but the time-lapse between each operation cannot now be determined. It is possible therefore that the foundation-tower was a feature of the site before Bishop Henry's fortification of it, through the addition of a motte, and that this tower formed an element of a country-house phase preceding the castle-palace.

One final piece of the jig-saw comes from the Pipe Rolls of the Bishops of Winchester. Entries in the 1283-4 Pipe Roll records the construction of houses within the keep, and over the well situated there.⁴⁴ The well referred to can only have been that in the centre of the complex and contained within the foundation-tower. The documentary evidence implies a substantial structure but it is not possible to infer with any sense of precision its overall form and size. It is however quite likely that Thompson's flange is the foundation for this well-house which would explain the lack of settlement and the relatively intact condition in which Thompson found the flange.

CONCLUSION

There is no reason to suppose that the 1138 entry in the *Annales de Monasterii de Wintonia* relates to the construction of the keep complex or to a wholly new castle at Farnham or indeed elsewhere. The 1138 Annal ought therefore to be taken only as a possible indication of the presence of a castle by the mid-1130s. In the absence of any other dating evidence from Farnham castle for either the 11th or 12th centuries, it remains impossible to determine either when the castle was first raised, or the sequence in which the buildings were constructed. The evidence of aspects of civil engineering present at Farnham, the curious masonry techniques employed, considerations of layout and design as well as the paucity of reliable dating evidence all suggest it is unlikely that Farnham was substantially a new construction of the 1130s. Comparisons drawn between Farnham and other de Blois sites, especially Bishop's Waltham, Witney and Wolvesey make a strong case for suggesting that the military phases at Farnham were preceded by a country-house phase.

When Thompson's proposed sequence for the construction of Farnham castle is examined in detail it becomes possible to outline an alternative sequence. This writer would therefore tentatively suggest that the sequence at Farnham was as follows:

Phase 1	pre-1100	Manor house and farm.
Phase 2	early 12th century	Country house built by Bishop Giffard.
Phase 3	c. 1130-40	Fortification of country house and construction of ringwork.
Phase 4	1155	Demolition of tower-keep.
Phase 5	post-1160	Construction of shell-keep.

⁴⁴ Work on this well was noted in the pipe roll for 1264-5 (EC 159295) with a new well-house and winding wheel being installed in 1283-4 (EC 159309).

Farnham was not one of de Blois's Anarchy castles, but should be added to the now considerable list of castles that are exceptions to the 1138 Winchester Annal. It therefore appears that Henry de Blois' building operations in southern England, important though they were, have been exaggerated and that the contribution of early bishops, such as William Giffard, has been under-rated. This article casts doubt on Thompson's chronology for Farnham and especially on the construction date. This, coupled with the growing evidence for 11th-century and earlier occupation of the town site, with its own urban defences, adjacent to the castle, has wider implications on our understanding of the critical relationship between the bishops' castle-palaces and their towns.⁴⁵

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to the late Philip Brooks for his many comments concerning the Pipe Rolls of the Bishops of Winchester and their evidence in connection with Farnham castle. His translations and commentary upon the Pipe Rolls relating to Farnham have provided a fund of information without which it is impossible to fully grasp the development of the castle-palace. I am also grateful to Mr Brian Durham, then of the Oxford Archaeological Unit, who discussed many aspects of Witney palace and its relationship with Farnham castle with me and to whom I owe the idea of the country-house phase being present at Farnham; Mr Tim Allen of the Oxford Archaeological Unit for his comments on Witney palace in advance of his publication of the excavation report on that site; and to Mr David Graham who brought to my attention the discovery of the possible bailey ditch at Farnham castle. I am also indebted to Professor Michael Hicks of King Alfred's College, Winchester, for his thoughtful comments and advice on the writing of this paper, Professor Tom Beaumont James of King Alfred's College for his guidance and advice, and to the anonymous referees whose comments on earlier drafts of this paper have given pause for thought.

⁴⁵ Riall, *op. cit.* in note 34, 123; see also N. Riall and V. A. Shelton-Bunn, *Excavations at Borelli Yard, Farnham* (Farnham, 1989).