The River Wey Bridges between Farnham and Guildford

by DEREK F. RENN, F.S.A.

At one time, the river Blackwater was fed by streams flowing from Alton, Frensham and Hindhead, through the fault in the chalk outcrop between Farnham and the Hog's Back. Slight earth movements and erosion changes, however, enabled a stream flowing eastward from Elstead to Godalming to cut back its bed and capture the headwaters of the Blackwater and divert them into the river Wey.1 The ten-mile stretch of river south of the Hog's Back (Fig. 1) is spanned by a notable series of bridges. Some are better-known than others, and the purpose of this paper is, first, to record the details of the bridges as they existed in 1970, second, to examine their construction and, lastly, to discuss their probable date and original purpose.

I Description of the Bridges

The upstream face of a bridge is liable to be damaged by objects swept down-river, and its cutwaters and arches are often altered and repaired in consequence. For this reason, the drawings are of the downstream face of each bridge, but both faces are described in the text. Six styles of cutwaters have been distinguished (Fig. 2):

I. Rounded, but sometimes keeled below flood level (la)
II. Keel to full height
III. Flat pilaster buttress
IV. Keel, but with chamfered top
V. Keel, with half-pyramid top
VI. Half-pyramid

As far as can be judged, Styles I and II are original, the others being the results of rebuilding.

The bridges are described in order, proceeding downstream from Farnham; the six-figure number in brackets is the National Grid Reference.

The Long Bridge at FARNHAM (SU841466) was mentioned as early as 12352. In 1814 it was described as

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[Diagram and text related to the bridges and their description are not transcribed here due to the nature of the task.]
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UPSTREAM CUTWATERS

Fig. 2. Types of cutwaters of the River Wey bridges.

having six small arches of brick and stone, but it was of timber in 1840 and rebuilt in cast iron in 1852.

A mile downstream, the river turns at right angles near HIGH MILL (SU857472). This was the pontis de Heghe, to be repaired in 1280 by the tithing of Compton and by Thomas le Tyheler, M.P., carpenter, contractor and miller, while Compton bridge was the responsibility of Waverley Abbey.

In 1223 a boy who lived at the Abbey gate fell into the river, and was only rescued after he had passed under four stone bridges. Both the bridge carrying the road past the entrance to WAVERLEY ABBEY (SU871456) and the footbridge next to the nearby lodge are of local sandstone rubble lined with brick. The road bridge has a Style I upstream cutwater and has been widened downstream; the other bridge is about eight feet wide, with two arches of about that span over the millstream. Harold Brakspear mentioned another bridge east of the abbey, and yet another bridge is indicated by the footpath from Tilford Mill which now ends abruptly on the steep bank immediately opposite the ruins (SU878452). The abbey fishponds were at the Black Lake, where there is a substantial brick and rubble causeway (SU865447).

A bridge at WANFORD (now Tilford Mill, SU868444) is mentioned in the first charter of Waverley Abbey. In 1925 it was of rubble with brick voussoirs, but has been rebuilt in brick, with timber posts and rails. It is only 12 feet wide, with two 16-foot span arches separated by a Style II upstream cutwater. As at Waverley itself, the river here runs below a steep cliff of ferruginous sandstone.

All the bridges now to be described as far as Guildford are mentioned in a survey of 1565 by a Commission of Sewers. One bridge (Catleshall) subsequently disappeared in the Godalming Navigation...
works, but the only additions are the two bridges in Peper Harow Park (shewn on Rocque's map of 1762), one of 1870 near Godalming church and the Eashing Bypass bridge of 1933-4.

In 1249, the Bishop of Winchester bequeathed to Waverley Abbey a fishpond \textit{qui situs incipit a parvo ponte ultra Tilford},\textsuperscript{10} and among the uncatalogued documents sent to the Hampshire Record Office from Farnham Castle in 1928 were (a) a parcel of lands, grants, etc., for repairing TILFORD bridges for

\begin{center}
\textbf{TILFORD EAST - CONTINUATION}
\end{center}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.8\textwidth]{tilford_east_continuation.png}
\caption{Plan and elevation (looking upstream) of the extension to the eastern bridge at Tilford. See also Fig. 3.}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.8\textwidth]{elstead_somersford.png}
\caption{Elevations of the bridges at Elstead and Somersford, looking upstream (brick parapets omitted).}
\end{figure}

sixty years (1574) and (b) an undated document stating that \textit{pontes lapidos voc' Tilford bridges modo sunt ruinos}...\textsuperscript{11} A 1648 receipt for bridgerent of 13s, 4d. 'arising out of tenements and yardland called Bridge­land in Tyldorf', and the Farnham Borough Court Books record expenditure by William Shotter, the last bailiff, in 1773 and 1778; he eventually resigned the task—and the borough charter of 1247—to the bishop of Winchester in 1789.\textsuperscript{12}

The two branches of the Wey at Tilford are separately bridged above the fords near their confluence, where there is steeply rising ground on the left banks. The west bridge (SU872436, Fig. 3) has four arches; a fifth, visible in 1925, is marked by an upstream cutwater and downstream projection in the left bank; the widened abutment at the other bank might also conceal another arch. The arches increase slightly in span and rise toward midstream, the upstream cutwaters being Style VI (the middle pair chamfered) and Style I downstream. The bridge is largely of ironstone rubble, with timber posts and rails; it is doubled by a concrete bridge downstream to take heavy and/or south­bound vehicles.

The east bridge (SU874434, Fig. 3) is generally similar, but has not been duplicated although a footway was built out over the upstream cutwaters in 1969-70 by using the ends of the oak bearers for the rails which were laid right athwart the bridge. It has six arches, a seventh being buried in the left bank and visible in 1925, just like the other Tilford Bridge, and now marked by cutwater and buttress. The arches increase in rise and span toward the middle, and the right bank arches have been rebuilt in brick and separated by a very wide Style II cutwater which appears to be an extension of an earlier and smaller one (Fig. 4). The other cutwaters are Style II upstream and I downstream.

In 1647 a rent of 2s. a year was set aside for the repair of ELSTEAD Bridge (SU905438, Fig. 5).\textsuperscript{13} Here a gravel terrace deflects the Wey sharply northward,
the river being forded across the angle. The ford is upstream of the right bank end of the bridge, which has iron X-ties to the five similar arches. There were probably more arches at one time, since both banks have cutwaters and buttresses buried in them. Banks and river-bottom are concreted, with a slope to the left bank where there is a low wide Style II upstream cutwater and a brick-lined flood channel. The bridge is built of sandstone rubble slabs and thick blocks of darker ironstone, much repainted. The second arch from the left bank had the date 1751 on the upstream keystone and the soffit shows marks of wooden centering in the cement rendering. Old photographs show that there were ledges in all the arch soffits. Style II cutwaters upstream, I down; brick parapets were added in 1826, braced with small pilasters on top of the old cutwaters. The County Bridge plate (see Somersford, below,) was removed when the bridge was doubled with a separate concrete bridge downstream for eastbound traffic.

**SOMERSET** was earlier Somersford, so named c. 965.14

Somersford brydge is decayed & downe and the cawsye thereunto adjoyning which brydge is the Queenes Maties bridge and by her highnes to be mayneteyned the stones of which brydg were carayed away by James Bromefelde and by him employed upon his own buyldinges and Pop6r, harow upon the ferm of Sr. Richard Pexall' Knight said the Commissioners in 1565.

The Weyburn road runs north east across a wide stretch of alluvium to the bridge (SU922439, Fig. 5), with a rise beyond to the Shackleford plateau. It has been much altered and tied with S-irons. The right abutment has been widened to 18 feet and pierced with a brick-lined arch with a shallow concrete channel. A sandstone slab bracketed to the parapet is inscribed:

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CAST IRON PLATE
SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL/NOTICE/
ANY PERSON STICKING BILLS/OR COMMITTING ANY
OTHER NUISANCE OR IN/ANY WAY DEFACING
OR DAMAGING THE BRIDGE/WILL BE PROSECUTED/COUNTY HALL

T. W. WEEDING
KINGSTON ON THAMES 1904

CLERK
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Of the other three arches, the central one has a double row of rubble slab voussoirs in a mixture of greensand and ironstone, while the others have been rebuilt in sandstone ashlar. The upstream cutwaters are Styles IV and V, with Style V downstream, with wide sloping starlings.

The 1724 marriage settlement between Richard Wyatt and Susanna More Molyneux15 refers to land at Puttenham and Peper Harow 'abutting on the river running from Casford bridge to the fulling mill bridge.' The latter might be Eashing, although Rocque’s map of 1762 shows two bridges in Peper Harow park, on the sites of the later footbridge and estate road bridge.

'Eashing Brydge is the Queenes Maties Brydge & is greetly in decay & is to be repayed by ye Quenes Mat.' said the Commissioners in 1565, describing it in the singular as 'a Brydge of Stone'. However it was the first Commissioner, as lord of the manor of Godalming, who found himself charged with its upkeep. The bridge (or bridges) was dilapidated in 1568, 1588 and 1726; 16 repairs in 1766 included 32 wagonloads of stone and 8,400 bricks.17 In 1900, the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings put the bridges in order for £70, Mr and Mrs Thackeray Turner giving the stone and paying the balance of cost not covered by an appeal.18 Two of the three contractors took no profit for their work, and the

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*Fig. 6. Elevations of the bridges at Eashing, looking upstream (timber posts and rails omitted).*
bridge was then gifted to the National Trust, which owns the island separating the two bridges (apart from the wooded North end), a L-shaped piece of waste on the left bank and one hundred yards of highway to either side. This last is probably an echo of Henry VIII's Statute of Bridges, which laid it down that, in the last resort, responsibility for the upkeep of a bridge rested on those landowners having a road frontage within a hundred yards of the bridge ends.

At EASHING the river flows North-east with a Bargate sandstone cliff on the right bank marking part of the thalweg at the beginning of the Godalming gorge. The bridges (SU946438, Fig. 6) cross the line of the fords of both river and millstream. Since they are in alignment and at the same level, and the causeway between them is not only mainly of stone but also has downstream projections possibly marking the position of former cutwaters, it is likely that they were once one bridge.

The arches are markedly angular in profile, and many of the Bargate rubble voussoir slabs have slipped radially. The mainstream is spanned by five arches, the southernmost being lower and narrower than the rest. Only the crown of the northernmost arch is visible in the left bank upstream, although the downstream face has another hint in the Style I cutwater in the bank, with Style Ia or II upstream cutwaters.

The millstream bridge is very similar but about a foot wider. Cutwaters buried in both banks suggest that there were at least two more arches than the three now visible.

The history of the bridges at GODALMING is complex. Westbrook Road is carried over a stream by a bridge (SU967440) of which two arches of local sandstone rubble slabs like Eashing (but only 4 feet wide) are visible, separated by a Style V cutwater upstream and Style I downstream. The ford across the Wey below the church has a brick road bridge of 1870 beside it as well as a timber footbridge on brick and rubble piers; The latter (Boarden Bridge) was dismantled in 1970. The bridge at the entrance to the town 'was formerly kept in repair by the owner of the hundred and manor of Godalming, who shut it against carriages of every sort except in time of flood', but it was made into a County Bridge in 1782 and widened twice, the second time in 1930–31. It now shows little trace of antiquity although it may prove significant that Leatherhead bridge, rebuilt under the same Act by the same surveyor, still retains traces of its earlier structure.

Aubrey mentions that the farthest end of the Causeway was the little Bishops Bridge [which] formerly belonged to the Bishop of Salisbury... now repaired by Loseley tho' on the high road. Perhaps this is the 'smaller bridge on the Guildford side' that was built by the owner of the hundred and manor of Godalming for the use of tenants, and continued to repair the older part after the structure was widened. (BUSBRIDGE is a Kentish family name; GATWICK bridge is mentioned by 1553).

Beyond Godalming, the Navigation works have much altered the river around Catteshall, but at UNSTEAD two gravel terraces turn the Wey due North toward Guildford. In 1565 Unsted Brydge is in gret Ruyn & utter decay but they [the Commissioners of Sewers] do not kno by whom it is to be repayred. But by the Voise of the Countrey it is to be repayred by Robert Warn' and Rychard Caryll' gent [& John Wykeshill gent deleted]. A cut was made in 1934 across the river meander to preserve the bridge (SU993454, Fig. 7), whose channel

**UNSTEAD**

**GUILDFORD TOWN**

Fig. 7. Elevations of the bridges at Unstead and (formerly) at Guildford, looking upstream (railings omitted). See ref. 30.
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**GUILDFORD**

Feb., 1900

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Fig. 8. Guildford Bridge before its final demolition, from a drawing by Thackeray Turner (S.P.A.B. see ref. 30).

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has partly silted up. The hump-backed bridge is 12 feet wide, of Bargate stone rubble apart from the brick voussoirs of the downstream face of the arch in the left bank. The five arches increase in span and rise toward what was midstream, with Style II upstream cutwaters, but only a flat ledge 6 inches wide round the bases of the piers downstream. The holes for the timber bearers of an earlier railing are now used to support an iron balustrade of square-sectioned uprights linked by rings of similar section, ending in wooden posts whose iron caps are embossed.

**WILLIAMS : FOUNDRY : FILMER : GUILDFORD**

There is also a County Bridge plate (see Somersford).

The Wey and Arun canal of 1813-16 followed the line of a natural stream. *Gildenbrig at UTWORTH* existed by 1251, Waterbridge at CRANLEIGH by 1263, and Gilbert de la Risbrigge was at WONERSH in 1279. Stonebridge at SHALFORD is mentioned in the latter year; a short-lived bridge was built at West Shalford in 1376, the only other bridge being a plank for pilgrims going to St Catherine's. The ferry at St Catherine's itself was the responsibility of Braboeuf Manor.

In 1201, Eva de Broc owed the king five marks *pro transgressione pontium de Geldejord*, although the bridge at Guildford repaired two years later may have been that of the castle rather than the town. The Wey passes through a gap worn in the chalk ridge at GUILDFORD, being fordable to the south of the Town Bridge (SU995494, Figs. 7, 8). The old bridge was 226 feet long but only 11 feet 4 inches wide between parapets (replaced by iron balustrades in the nineteenth century, when iron arches were added to support a widened carriageway). There were five arches increasing in rise and span toward midstream, with a flood-arch in the right bank. The central arch was raised and rebuilt in brick in 1760 to allow the passage of barges, and a contemporary plan and elevation with a Design 'for altering & Widening the same' shows large Style II cutwaters carried up, with the points cut off, to form pedestrian refuges. But a drawing of 1754 shows the cutwaters tapering off below road level, and

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**POSSIBLE FALSEWORK**

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Fig. 9. Suggested methods of timber framing to support masonry while the arches and piers were being built (see page 83).
nineteenth-century photographs show sloping Style III cutwaters downstream and arches with double rings of thin slabs voussoirs on each side of the brick arch. In 1900 floodwater swept timber under the arches, and the central one collapsed; the rest were demolished and an iron bridge erected.30

The king's bridge in Guildford Park is mentioned in 1303, and WOODBRIDGE was said to have been built in Stephen's reign to replace a ford drowned when the Bishop of London moved his mill to the south bank of the river, but the Bishop alleged that it had been built in the time of Edward I.31 STOKE BRIDGE is named during the reign of Edward III, and the bridge at SEND in 1279.32 Elmbridge at WOKING was broken during the reign of Edward III, and the bridge at WORPLESDON was said to have been built in 1273.33 WYE BRIDGE is named in Domesday Book, and the bridge of Wey in 1235. The bridge in BYFLEET Park was repaired in 1447, and in 1571 both Byfleet and Weybridge Bridges were in decay.34

II The Construction of the Bridges

We can summarise the descriptions of the bridges by saying that they are built of local rubble, the arch voussoirs being single or double rings of thin slabs, usually with timber railings supported by posts and struts on bearers. Dimensions and other features may be tabulated as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Width in feet</th>
<th>Cutwater Styles</th>
<th>Number of arches</th>
<th>Arch span in feet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Waverley Mill</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanford</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tilford West</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tilford East</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elstead</td>
<td>12½</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somersford</td>
<td>12½</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eashing North</td>
<td>12½</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eashing South</td>
<td>13½</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Godalming Westbrook</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Godalming Town</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15³</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unstead</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15³</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guildford Town</td>
<td>14²</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18³</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Rebuilt in brick  2 Including brick parapets  3 Some significantly less

Two features of the bridges need further comment: the rounded downstream cutwaters, and the rubble arch construction. Most Roman bridges had piers with only a pointed cutwater upstream, although it must have been realised that a downstream buttress would reduce eddying of the water and hence the scour that undermined piers. The Roman bridge at Trier has piers which are rounded downstream, so presenting no corner to be damaged by flood debris and a good 'hydrodynamic' profile, still carrying a main road after eighteen centuries.35 The plan, however, is uncommon, at least in England. The rubble voussoirs of the arches would have to have been supported on timber falsework until the mortar set. The more usual bridge construction used ashlar ribs to support the arch web during building. Medieval mortar took a long time to set, and it was essential that the falsework should be taken down at the right moment. Too early, and the 'green' mortar would not prevent radial slippage and collapse; too late, and the arch might be partly overstressed and brittle, and unable to ease the strain by slight movement.36 The varying span of the arches of the same bridge, and the irregular profiles (often angular) suggest that the falsework was not elaborately carpentered; there are no traces of centering slots. A simple frame of poles lashed together and covered with brushwood and earth37 would suffice to support the arch stones until the mortar set (Fig. 9). The brushwood would have sufficient resilience to bend under uneven load, and the earth would mould the profile; both wood and earth could be removed easily if necessary to check the mortar setting, and finally pulled into the space within the frame, which in turn could be dismantled in situ by cutting the lashings. Recent repairs to the timber bearers of both Tilford bridges showed that they had a core of loose rubble between the faces and above the arches.

III The Builders of the Bridges

The similarity of size and detail of the bridges, alongside early fords, suggest that they were probably built as a group for a common purpose. Their architecture is vernacular, without dateable detail. They are unlikely to be Roman, since the intensive Roman-British occupation on the sunny slopes below the
William More, the first Commissioner, might just conceivably have built them to assist the transport of stone from the dissolved Waverley Abbey to build Loseley House between 1561-9, but there is nothing in the building accounts to substantiate this. Groups of similar bridges are rare, although there is a group near Maldon in square rubble or ashlar, with ribbed arches, perhaps of fourteenth-century date. The double ring of rubble voussoir slabs occurs in thirteenth-century bridges at Barnstaple and Carmarthen and, much nearer home, in the former crossing arches of the abbey church and parlour vault at Waverley, perhaps of 1193-1214.

There were at least four stone bridges on the Wey below Waverley Abbey in 1223 and 'certain stone bridges' were damaged by flood ten years later—dictamen et communia may not imply total destruction. Could the surviving bridges be as old as this, at least in origin? Guildford bridge existed by 1201, but it lay on the highway between the capital and the new naval base at Portsmouth, and it was on a somewhat larger scale than those upstream. None of the latter appear to have had their cutwaters carried up to form pedestrian refuges, a common practice from the fourteenth century at least.

The manor of Godalming passed into the hands of the Bishop of Salisbury in 1224, and Farnham was given its borough charter by the Bishop of Winchester in 1247. The Longbridge at Farnham existed by 1235, providing a link between the town and Waverley Abbey. Both Farnham and Godalming bridges have been rebuilt, so that but impossible to determine whether they were similar to the other bridges described. Both bishoprics had built bridges in the early thirteenth century to attract trade to newly-founded towns (New Alresford, Downton; Hardham, New Sarum), but there were no settlements near most of our bridges. Indeed, so many neighbouring bridges alongside the fords of a river seem superfluous, at least for human traffic. Was it the needs of husbandry, of moving crops and animals, that required so many bridges?

This points to the most likely builders being the monks of Waverley Abbey, just as Oseney abbey built a number of bridges on its Oxford estates. At the Dissolution, Waverley held the advowson and mills of a compact group of parishes on either bank of the Wey downstream nearly to Guildford, together with the fishing rights. Some at least of these acquisitions had been made in the twelfth century, but it is during the reign of John that Waverley appears most prominently in history. Although the monks dispersed in 1203, the abbey was the scene of discussions the next year between the royal agents and the monks of Winchester on the succession to the bishopric, and King John was at Waverley at the start of the Interdict when the second church was begun. A second dispersion followed in 1210, but by 1212 the abbey had recovered sufficiently to lend carts to the king, and in 1214 the church was partly consecrated and the abbey went to France on royal business. Royal building-work was going on nearby at Guildford and Odiham castles. Brother John of Waverley was of sufficient standing as a mason to undertake royal contracts by 1226; his reputation could not have depended on the Wey bridges, but the circumstantial evidence points to his generation and abbey as the most probable authors of the bridges of the middle Wey.

**REFERENCES**

**Abbreviations**

M. & B. Manning and Bray, *History and Antiquities of Surrey* (1804-14).


Surrey A.S. Surrey Archaeological Society.

Surrey A.C. Surrey Archaeological Collections.

V.C.H. Surrey Victoria County History of Surrey.


2. P.-N. Surrey, 123.


7. H. Brakspear, Waverley Abbey (Surrey A.S., 1905), 18.

8. Calendar of Charter Rolls, III, 372 and Note 43.


10. Annales Monastici, (Rolls Series), II, 342.


13. V.C.H. Surrey, II, 605 citing 'Mr Howard's Papers'.


15. Sussex County Magazine, V (1931), 788.


19. Copy deed in the South-East Area Office of the National Trust, Polesden Lacey.

20. 22 Hen. VIII cap. 5; Statutes of the Realm, III, (1817), 321-3.


26. The Times, 30 May, 1934. I owe this reference and a number of those following to the late G. D. Johnston.
27. Sussex Record Society, LIX, nos 214, 235 and 238; *P.-N. Surrey*, 233; *Sussex Notes and Queries*, IV (1932), 50.


29. *Rotuli de Oblatis et Finibus* (Record Commission, London, 1835), 157; Pipe Roll 3 John, 229; 5 John, 224 (Pipe Roll Society, n.s. 14 and 16 (1936, 1938)).


33. *P.-N. Surrey*, 161, 163 and 143; *Public Works in Medieval Law* (Selden Society XL), 176; *Surrey A.C.*, XXVI (1913), 144.


41. *Annales Monastici*, (Rolls Series), II, 298 and 312.

42. I owe this parallel to Mr D. Sturdy.

43. Loseley MS. 479/1, 2; *Monasticon Anglicanum*, V, 237-43.


45. *Annales Monastici* (Rolls Series), II, 265 and 268; *Surrey A.C.*, XXXVI (1925), 46.


47. J. H. Harvey, *English Medieval Architects* (1954), 288. His name also occurs in the Winchester Pipe Roll of 1210/11 (ed. N. Holt, p. 90) and in 1293 at Guildford Park (Exch. K. R. Accounts, bundle 492, no. 10) but these cannot all relate to one person.