# LATE-MEDIEVAL SETTLEMENT: THE EFFECT OF BASTARD FEUDALISM ON THE GREAT HOUSES OF ENGLAND

*By* SARAH KERR[1]

## Introduction

This paper discusses the extent to which bastard feudalism contributed to the development of lodging ranges in late medieval great houses. Lodging ranges have not yet received sustained analysis beyond brief summary descriptions in Wood (1965) and Grenville (1997) and more thorough discussions by Emery (1970, 2000a, 2000b, 2006). They were important features in great houses, often located around a courtyard, composed of two or three stories. They are associated with manors of considerable wealth and are identifiable by repeated architecture, uniform façades and high-status features, in particular individual doors. Bastard feudalism is the term given to the feudal arrangement by which a nobleman would retain a retinue of able-bodied men, bound by indenture, in return for payment. An indenture frequently detailed the role of the man retained, the retainer, as having the ability to bear arms if required by their lord, wear his livery and serve him during times of war and peace (Woolgar 1999, 8; McFarlane 1973, 104; Powicke 1962, 168; Saul 1981, 60). The bastard feudal system developed and became part of the normal fabric of society as the European model, introduced in the 11th century, declined in practicality and use (Carpenter 2014, 59; Hicks 2000, 390). The size of retinues increased and there was a growth in the number of people who had the means to hire a retinue. Some members of the retinue required accommodation within the great house, which led to the development of the courtyard directly from the cross-wing plan, incorporating the lodging range for members of the retinue. An examination of lodging ranges demonstrates a further effect of bastard feudalism: the need to emphatically display the stratification of medieval society within the great house.

## Bastard feudalism

The term bastard feudalism was coined in the 19th century by Charles Plummer (1885, 15) to highlight the differences between the European model of feudalism and what he saw as a degenerate system characterising the Wars of the Roses in the mid-15th century (Saul 1981, 103; McFarlane 1981, 23; Hicks 1995, 12). After the Battle of Hastings, William parcelled out land to the lords of England; and this system permeated the ranks of English aristocracy. The commodity which passed from greater lords to lesser lords was land, and in return they received loyalty. This system became less common in the late medieval period in favour of monetary payments, and Plummer and his contemporary Stubbs

(1903), argued that the new system meant it became easier to wage war, sway government and thwart justice, as people strived to achieve their own personal agendas (Hicks 1995, 2). This view of 'ovur mightie subgiettes', as described by Fortescue (Plummer 1885, 127), who changed allegiance to the highest bidder when it suited them, has been repeatedly contested (McFarlane 1973, 1981; Carpenter 2014). Medieval England was a feudal society and the bastard-feudal format was as respectable and accepted as the system introduced by William of Normandy (Carpenter 2014, 60). Therefore, while the term mischaracterises the late medieval period, it is commonly accepted in historical discourse to refer to the system which contributed to the complexity and size of the household, as well as increased social mobility in the wider medieval society.

Bastard feudalism was commonplace by the 15th century; but its origins have been disputed (Hicks 2000, 391). Plummer argued that bastard feudalism was introduced when there was a military requirement for the Hundred Years' War under the reign of Edward III (Plummer 1885, 17; Powicke 1962, 182). However, it is unlikely that this was the birth of the bastard feudal system although indentures do survive from this campaign. Rather bastard feudalism appears to have emerged more organically, as the earlier system declined in practicality (Carpenter 2014, 59). It appears in the historical record during the reign of Edward I, who raised a crusading army with indentures in 1270 (Hicks 1995, 19). The identification of this period as the beginning of bastard feudalism is now generally supported (McFarlane 1981, 25; Hicks 1995, 19; Powicke 1962, 167; Carpenter 2014, 76).

A retinue comprised all followers of the lord, resulting in some ambiguity with the term and overlap with members of the household. The highest ranking retainers, themselves members of the gentry, had their own estates in which they lived. Potential duties may have included travelling with the lord, dealing with tenants, settling disputes and serving him in a military capacity on occasion (Wood 1965, 177; Emery 2006, 29). The main body of the retinue would comprise the liveried retainers, men hired to support the lord on occasions of importance in return for an annual fee, plus the livery itself. These men would visit the lord and erect temporary accommodation on these occasions (Wood 1965, 177; Emery 1970, 220). The retinue in its broadest sense would also include low-ranking members of the household, who were rewarded with food, board and etiquette experience (Fleming 2001, 74; 75). Household members or 'below stairs' servants who carried out the menial tasks of food preparation, cleaning and laundering, may have added bulk to the travelling retinue

[1] Queen's University Belfast.

or a campaign in some instances (Fleming 2001, 74; Bellamy 1989, 93). This was probably not commonplace as the skills required were not synonymous with hall and chamber duties.

The role of the retainer ordinarily went beyond military duty and some had roles within the great house. Therefore, as the potential size of the retinue increased, so did the size and complexity of the household, although the two entities were not one and the same. For an accurate understanding of the retinue it must be appreciated that a lord could use bastard feudalism to swell his following for a military campaign and means of display, or for a more constant role in the running of the manor.

Bastard feudalism allowed more people to hire a retinue, as inherited land was no longer a prerequisite; instead, monetary wealth was of utmost importance. At a time when the economy was growing and becoming more cash-based, money was the best means of upward mobility. Therefore as a cash-based system, bastard feudalism allowed greater social mobility among, and into, the patriciate: as McFarlane described it, 'nobility was always for sale' (McFarlane 1973, 9).

Money permeated through the social ranks resulting in greater social mobility, particularly within the upper echelons of society (McFarlane 1973, 11; 121; Herlihy 1973, 625). The previous feudal system potentially restricted the fluidity of social movement, as land was the main determinant of wealth, status and power, and was mainly gained through inheritance. Families which survived through the male line retained the land of their forefathers and added to their estates through marriage to those families not survived by the male line. This resulted in an accumulation of estates in the ownership of fewer families (Payling 1992, 51). However, bastard feudalism allowed men to gain wealth outside of land ownership and thus the hierarchy increased in medieval England (Payling 1992, 51). This growing stratification is seen through the increase of ranks within the peerage: there was only one heritable rank in 1300 but five by 1500 (McFarlane 1973, 123).

The growth of bastard feudalism coincided with the Wars of the Roses. The social and political turmoil of the period only contributed to this 'age of ambition' (Carpenter 1992, 152; Hicks 2000, 387). Through the connections bastard feudalism created, many families rose quickly through the ranks if they supported the winning side. William Herbert (d.1469), previously ap Thomas, supported the House of York and ascended the political hierarchy after becoming the first Welshman to become earl (Emery 1975, 154; 164). His surge in wealth can be seen in the additions he made to Raglan Castle, Pembrokeshire, including a lodging range.

While this is a simplification of complex social and political relationships, the understanding of bastard feudalism forms a platform from which the effect on buildings can be analysed.

## Great houses in late-medieval England

Bastard feudalism affected the plan of late-medieval great houses in a number of ways. It allowed lords to retain larger retinues than in previous centuries due to the use of monetary payments. The increase in social mobility, accelerated by bastard feudalism, meant more lords had the means to retain a retinue. These catalysts led to the inclusion of lodging ranges in the great house and the development of the courtyard plan (Grenville 1997, 116; Emery 2005, 150). Furthermore the introduction of high ranking retainers meant some members of the retinue were of a high status in their own right, resulting in a requirement to physically represent social distance with the household (Grenville 1997, 116).

As the household grew, sometimes to 'monstrous dimensions' (Mertes 1988, 185), it could no longer be contained within the constraints of a cross-wing house, and the courtyard plan developed organically (Wood 1965, 61; Grenville 1997, 103). Some households could be contained around one courtyard, but larger households of lords who fully exploited the bastard feudal system often had two or more courtyards. They utilised this space to separate staff, services and stables from the family's accommodation. This was first adopted towards the end of the 14th century and became the standard plan by the mid-15th century (Grenville 1997, 105). The standard plan had the hall as a common space separating the two courtyards, acting as the boundary between the private courtyard enjoyed by the lord's family, and the more public courtyard which included the entrance and services (Grenville 1997, 103).

An important element of the courtyard plan was the inclusion of lodging ranges. These were a 14th–16th century phenomenon as they were built to house the followers of the lord whose number increased with the development of bastard feudalism. A lodging range had a number of distinct features, such as a uniform façade, which made it identifiable to the viewer. Indeed, the medieval audience would have recognised the building as accommodation for retainers, and this remains the case today as they are architecturally distinct in ruins and restored houses. They provided accommodation and acted as a status indicator demonstrating substantial funds to build the range, and pay those who lived within. Established families used this feature to reinforce their power and wealth upon the viewer, while the *nouveau riche* built them to advertise their newfound wealth. A lodging range was a physical representation of the bastard feudal relationship and the power of the lord (Hicks 2000, 390).

The extent to which bastard feudalism affected the great house can be seen in the archaeological record. An exploration of secondary sources, including grey literature, revealed 65 examples of lodging ranges in England and Wales. The majority of these are now lost and some of those which remain survive in small parts only. The known sites were dated based on established sources, such as Pevsner, which revealed that all were built between *c*. 1230 and *c*. 1570 (Fig. 1). The earliest known example from the early 13th century is something of an anomaly. It has been suggested that this example at Wells Bishop's Palace, Somerset, was a range located on the first floor of Jocelin's range, which has since been extensively altered (Emery 2006, 669). It appears the range did contain accommodation, but primarily for Bishop Jocelin rather than his followers.

Of the known examples of lodging ranges, there are just four dated to the early 14th century, and eighteen to the second half of the century. The high
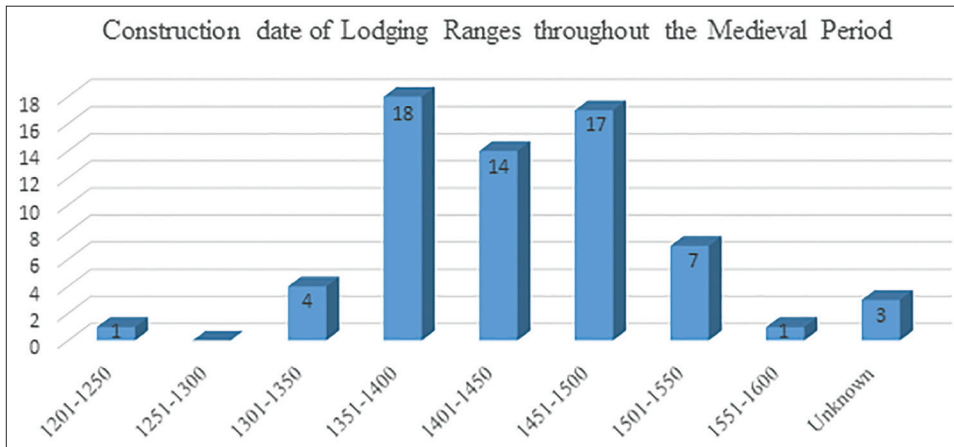
*Figure 1  Graph showing the construction dates of the known lodging ranges. Despite the low overall number of sites, there is a concentration apparent indicating an increase in the construction of lodging ranges between 1351 and 1500.*

number of known examples is sustained until the early 16th century, from which there are only seven known examples.

While the number of known lodging ranges is the result of survival rates, there is a considerable concentration between mid-14th century and the beginning of the 16th century (Fig. 1). It is reasonable to interpret this as a real increase in construction during this 150 year period, despite the small overall number. The construction of lodging ranges slowed and stopped by the end of the 16th century. The last known example to be constructed was Sudeley Castle, Gloucester, built in 1572.

A study of the known examples and the temporal distribution indicates no evidence of communication of ideas over the time period; rather all lodging ranges were fairly evenly distributed, with a slight concentration of late examples in south-west England and an apparent increase in building activity in the late-14th century in north-east England.

The spatial distribution is fairly even across England, with two examples in Wales, and no known examples of the same type in Scotland or Ireland due to the different feudal systems. There is a very slight concentration of known lodging ranges between the Humber and the Exe, which allows a tentative suggestion that lodging ranges were more commonplace in the Central Province (Roberts and Wrathmell 2002, 119). The development away from grain cultivation to livestock pasture allowed high rents, resulting in an economically prosperous area with a number of politically strong and wealthy lords (Williamson *et al.* 2013, 3).

Much like a medieval hall, with its typical plan of low and high ends, lodging ranges are easily identifiable by reoccurring features. They are typically two-storeyed although there are some three-storey examples, such as South Wingfield Manor, Derbyshire, and Thornbury Castle, Gloucester. They display uniform facades and contain indicators of high status such as individual doors and garderobes. They often have features paired together, such as the garderobe doors at Amberley Castle, Sussex (TQ 02716 13190), contributing to the uniform elevation (Fig. 2).



*Figure 2  Paired garderobe doors at Amberley Castle, contribute to the uniform elevation. Paired features are a main characteristic of lodging ranges, present in nearly all examples.*

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The rooms within the lodging ranges were of a high-status, as they provided a garderobe, fireplace and often more than one window, sometimes highly decorated. They often had an individual door per room. This indicates high-status occupants compared to others living in the great house, such as servants or retainers staying temporarily. Although the occupants of the lodging range were certainly under the jurisdiction of the lord, an individual door represented the right of occupancy of that room (Stocker 2005). Although the room would not have been private in the modern sense, the individual door epitomised social distance between those who could enter and those who could not. In a large retinue these differences in social standing were of the utmost importance.

All examples of lodging ranges possess similar features, and variations from this can be attributed to the wealth of the lord. For example, the lodging range at Thornbury Castle, Gloucestershire (ST 63274 90692), measured almost 83 m in length. The founder of Thornbury Castle was Edward Stafford, 3rd Duke of Buckingham, nephew of Queen Elizabeth Woodville, and part of the Plantagenet family (Emery 2005, 160). The lodging range located in the outer courtyard contained at least ten rooms, and it appears Buckingham was planning further rooms, possibly double this amount or more, before building ceased with his execution for treason in 1521. As a wealthy member of an established family he desired a retinue of considerable size.

At Brook Hall, Wiltshire (ST 85524 51749), the lodging range measured just 25 m in length. Robert Willoughby, founder of Brook Hall, was a close confidante of Henry VII who climbed the social hierarchy after fighting alongside Henry at the Battle of Bosworth. He became lord steward, admiral of the fleet, then 1st Baron Brook in 1491 (West Wiltshire District Council 2004, 1). He was part of the *nouveau riche*, and his royal service allowed him to rise quickly through the ranks of gentry. He was able to afford a modest lodging range of six rooms. However, Willoughby's son enjoyed none of the royal favour his father had (Crittall 1965, 151) and the family lost their wealth as quickly as it had been gained.

These two examples, at opposite ends of the ever-growing patriciate, demonstrate how important the lodging range was for indicating status in the late medieval period. Whether the family was established with a known wealth, or a new baron ascending the social ranks, having the means to afford a retinue was the principle indication of wealth at this time (Wood 1965, 177).

Beyond the great house retainers continued to demonstrate the wealth of the lord. They were at the forefront of pageantry in late medieval England (Saul 1981, 84). This was gaining popularity, encouraged by Richard II, whose vision of elaborate ceremonies was influenced by the continental examples of his contemporary Charles V and his father's court at Aquitaine (Woolgar 1999, 198). At the centre of these practises of chivalry, tournaments, and jousting were the retainers (Woolgar 1999, 104).

Bastard feudalism contributed to the expansion of social hierarchy, and the increase in its complexity; the result was a greater desire to restrict social movement by visually demonstrating the social difference between groups. For the upper classes it was politically and socially unwise not to fully display their power, while they also wanted to restrict the lower classes to 'aspire to non hygher' (Plummer 1885, 30; Wood 1965, 179; McFarlane 1973, 122; Carpenter 1992, 615). In an attempt to make social status recognisable, and therefore easier to maintain, sumptuary laws were introduced (Smith 2009, 313). Those issued by Henry II restricted the use of scarlet, sable, vair and gris, so only his retinue could wear these to promote the House of Plantagenet (Lachaud 1996, 281; 288). This was reinforced in 1463 and 1483, and again by Henry VIII, indicating the importance of displaying one's correct status; however, it also demonstrates how they were not universally adhered to during this period of social mobility (Smith 2009, 315).

The great house was a microcosm of the medieval society, so it was equally important to distinguish the social hierarchy within. Throughout the medieval period this was clearly displayed for the lord and those at the other end of the spectrum. For example, servants did not have a designated sleeping room but would sleep where there was space and warmth. As the size of the household increased through the inclusion of retainers, who themselves may have been of a considerable rank, it became more important to display social distance and to physically represent the differences in social class.

Social distance developed and became more important throughout the medieval period. By the 15th century the permeability of the high-status rooms, such as the chambers of the lord and lady, changed so that they became more 'private' within the complex (Richardson 2003, 131). In unencumbered sites the social distance was physically represented with areas of low status located far from those of high status. In some examples, areas of differing status were located near or abutting one another but were not connected, highlighting the differences between the occupants of those rooms and their activities. The lodging range at Gainsborough Old Hall, Lincolnshire (SK 81307 90002), was located perpendicular to the services at the low end of the hall. At the connection of the two ranges, a porch gave access to both. There was no other integration between them and the floor levels within were even different. This appears to have been a deliberate action during the construction of the Old Hall to create social distance between the low-status functions of the services and the accommodation for the retainers.

The effect of bastard feudalism is seen clearly at Dartington Hall, Devon (SX 79862 62694) which was built *c*. 1390. Dartington has well-preserved examples of extensive lodging ranges, with the west range measuring nearly 76 m in length. There were 18 rooms in the west range and potentially the same number or more in the east range, which remains in a reduced state with extensive alterations. This suggests that John Holand, half-brother of Richard II, had a substantial household, including numerous retainers (Emery 2007, 230; Currie and Rushton 2004, 189).

An examination of the remains allowed some analysis of social distance and the identification of an epicentre of power within the great house. This was a direct effect of bastard feudalism; the convoluted hierarchy of

Hall end:
High-status rooms

Gatehouse end:
Lower status rooms

*Figure 3    The west range at Dartington Hall exhibits social distance of the retinue. The rooms closer to the hall are larger than those situated closer to the gatehouse.*



*Figure 4a    The image shows the direction of the staircase, now removed, which gave access to the first-floor room. This is different to the other staircases on the range, and this would have been distinctive to the medieval audience.*



*Figure 4b    This images is an example of the other staircases on the west range. The stairs inclined from south to north, the opposite of the example beside the lord's chambers.*

medieval society was represented within the household as a microcosm of the wider sphere (Wood 1965, 177). At Dartington there were 16 identical rooms in the west range. At the south end of the range there were two different rooms, larger than the remainder. It is clear that these rooms were of a higher status; one on each floor, they had individual doors leading into large rooms, which were probably divided by timber partitions, possibly into an inner and outer chamber. These rooms abut the lord's chambers to the south and are closer to the hall

than other retainer accommodation (Fig. 3). The stairs leading to the first-floor room ascend in a north–south direction (Fig. 4a), the opposite direction of the others on this range (Fig. 4b). The stairs of this range were external, therefore visible to the medieval audience.

This difference demonstrated visually that the retainers living in the larger rooms beside the lord's chambers were of a higher status than the remainder of the retinue, who occupied the remaining 16 rooms in this range.

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*Figure 5   Middleham: the door connecting the first-floor rooms in the lodging range to the keep, allowing those retainers social distance from other members of the household.*

The fabric of the east range does not survive, though these rooms may have been of a lower status that those in the west range, demonstrating a further rank in Holand's retinue. Part of the range was demolished before the mid-19th century, and it was in a state of ruin by 1734 when it was detailed in Bucks' engraving. This may have been the result of early abandonment if the range was considered of a lower status that its counterpart opposite. As the east range is the furthest from the lord's chamber, and closer to the services, it appears to have been accommodation for further retainers, of a lower rank than those who occupied the west range. This positioning indicates that the architecture and plan of the great house was imbued with social distance.

Dartington Hall demonstrates the effect of bastard feudalism on a manor house which was built in an unrestricted site. Social distance was still vital to the organisation of the late medieval great house, even if it

was built within the constraints of an earlier site, as at Middleham Castle, North Yorkshire (SE 12664 87616). On such sites social distance had to be demonstrated in different ways to maintain high-status and low-status areas.

At Middleham, the lodging ranges were added in the 14th century to an established site, restricted by the curtain wall built *c*. 1300 surrounding the 12th century keep. The lodging range located in the west range comprised three stories. Due to the restrictions of the curtain wall, it was just metres from the keep. The ground-floor rooms were accessed through individual doors directly from the courtyard, while the first-floor had two rooms with individual staircases and two with access through the large central garderobe tower. However the first-floor rooms had an additional access route which involved a wooden bridge leading from the range to the keep. The location of the door can be seen

in the ruin and the corbels which supported the bridge remain (Fig. 5). This allowed those inhabitants of the first-floor to access the hall without travelling through the courtyard with the associated hustle and bustle. This distinguished these people as higher status and created social distance between them and those retainers in the remainder of the range who could not use this access. While the retainers were located physically close, this difference in access created pronounced social distance, demonstrating the hierarchy within the retinue.

## Conclusion

Bastard feudalism underpinned the status of the aristocracy by providing hired manpower. The lodging ranges of great houses suggest that the manpower was required to demonstrate the wealth and standing of the lord, rather than primarily in a military sense (Emery 2005, 144). Furthermore, the social tie between lord and retainer was potentially of as much importance as the monetary payment, since these connections assisted one's progress up the social ladder (Saul 1981, 103). This is supported by the presence of lodging ranges in the lord's house as it suggests the retainers had duties in times of peace, such as keeping their lord company, playing him at dice and acting as an advisor (Dunham 1970, 10; Hicks 1995, 46; Saul 1981, 85). Bastard feudalism may have been a different feudal relationship to its predecessor, but it is misleading to assume it was a debased form of feudalism or less stable than the European model. With a discernible effect on the archaeological record, it is clear this system was accepted and widespread throughout society.

Bastard feudalism developed at time of social change and was not the only factor to affect the plan of the great house. However, the increase in monetary payments contributed to the acceleration of social mobility. In turn this enabled more men to retain and be retained, and contributed to the development of a cash-based economy. The plan of the great house changed as a consequence, the greatest development being the inclusion of lodging ranges. Often associated with aristocracy, lodging ranges were also built by the *nouveau riche* rising through the gentry, advertising their improved prosperity.

The increased social mobility called for the visualisation of social distance through all elements of medieval life, particularly seen in the plan of great houses. In some examples the site allowed for this to equate to physical distance, as at Dartington Hall. At Middleham Castle space was restricted and social distance was demonstrated using the unique system of a suspended bridge. This representation of the differing retainers' status in the great house was an attempt to reduce the social fluidity caused by bastard feudalism, almost to set their social position in stone.

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