

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

## The aristocratic residence in the Plantagenet world: halls, chambers and towers

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As one who has spent much of his professional life pursuing research interests in France, whose doctoral thesis on the vernacular architecture of Brittany was written in English but published in Scotland<sup>1</sup>—and most of whose subsequent publications are written in the French language—I am deeply honoured to be invited to be President of the Cambrian Archaeological Association for the year 2010–11. It is with great pleasure, and not a little surprise, that I—a fifth generation immigrant into England, albeit one of distinguished Welsh descent—accept the challenge and offer some thoughts on the findings of over forty years’ research, mostly in a foreign field.

### INTRODUCTION

Following the completion of the research project on the vernacular architecture of Brittany we embarked upon a long-term study of the aristocratic residences of that region. This ambitious project required more resources than could be supplied by a single field worker and a small team was formed to work collaboratively with Michael Jones<sup>2</sup> and Jon Pilcher,<sup>3</sup> the former providing necessary documentary expertise, the latter the input of absolute dating by dendrochronology, a technique entirely new to the region. Invaluable expertise at the outset was also provided by Dr Frédéric Guibal and subsequently by Dr Martin Bridge, assisted by Andy Moir. Over several decades Don Shewan has valiantly assured the necessary technical support and remains a close collaborator. This ongoing research has resulted in a large number of publications, and is to be published in book form.

In parallel to this project, another initiative took shape during the 1980s. Two of us met regularly in Brittany—in the field at the weekend—to discuss and share our various contributions to the project on the seigneurial domestic buildings of Brittany. One of us was wholly engaged in the field during the week, the other worked in the relevant archives on surviving documents. It was occasionally at the weekend that we were able to meet to discuss our findings, taking the opportunity to revisit some of our *manoirs* and *châteaux*. Many of these had never been studied to modern standards, and most were largely unknown and unpublished. After a year or two these regular gatherings were formalized into an annual weekend at the beginning of September, to which specialist colleagues were invited, mostly British initially. A number of French enthusiasts gradually began to join us to discuss *in situ* the origins, construction and evolution of these standing buildings. In time this small group became a serious Franco-British Field Seminar, though remaining informal. Whilst early meetings were held in Brittany, in order to place Breton findings in a wider context we began to adventure into neighbouring regions of France. Each year a different region



was selected where one or more of the group had undertaken original research with results to present and discuss in the field. Over a period of thirty years or more we have visited the Cotentin, the pays d'Auge, the Avranchin, Anjou, Maine, Touraine, Périgord, Quercy, the Guyenne and Gascony, the Channel Islands, south-west England and more recently Eastern England. On one occasion we returned to Burgundy where several of us had previously studied the Romanesque town houses of Cluny and seigneurial residences of the Clunisian estates in that region.<sup>4</sup> Our aim has always been, and remains, to examine monuments new to most of us and to see and discuss the research, discoveries and ideas of one or more of our colleagues, frequently leading to a fresh interpretation of the structures.

From the early 1980s our group has grown considerably from a handful of close colleagues, mostly British, to some forty or more enthusiasts, mostly French; at any one time we are rarely more than twenty in the field. United by a passion for the study of domestic architecture, our interests, territorially, extend far beyond the limits of this Presidential Address which is concerned with a broad swath of land from Hadrian's Wall in the north, to the Pyrenees in the south-west. This territory corresponds largely to those regions once held directly by the Plantagenet rulers of an Anglo-French realm, or at least strongly influenced by them (Fig. 1). There can be no hard boundaries; cultural diffusion is no respecter of frontiers and man-made limits. The spread of styles arises from human contact; the tides of human ambition rise and fall with the passage of time. As the years passed the group grew so that every year we have held true field seminars principally devoted to the residences of the aristocracy, *manoirs* and *châteaux*; chiefly the homes of the minor and middling aristocracy though we follow closely studies of the greater residences and palaces.

Each member of the group has already published results of our diverse researches, chiefly in the journals of learned societies, local, regional or national, in the form of books or of university theses. Our collective competence results from a wide variety of disciplines: several among us are historians, others were trained in art history or archaeology; architecture, ethnology and geography also feature, sometimes strongly, in the study of historic buildings. Of those who have participated, some exercise, or have exercised, responsibilities in the conservation of historic monuments as architect or inspector, others are, or were, university professors. Several are but at the beginning of their career, one is a master mason. Our most prolific author has recently completed a career in the French army. We are united not only by a common passion for the subject but most importantly by a willingness to share our experiences and to discuss in a friendly ambiance our objectives and aspirations.

Previous research results of several of the group have already been published in collective works.<sup>5</sup> Certain members of the group had written important monographs dealing with domestic architecture, urban or rural, the product of research conducted in the context of university theses, or for the conservation services of the *Directions régionales des Affaires culturelles*. Among these significant contributions to the subject may be mentioned the work of Philip Dixon in northern England (Fig. 2),<sup>6</sup> that of Edward Impey in southern England and Normandy,<sup>7</sup> of Yves Lescroart in the Pays d'Auge,<sup>8</sup> of Anne-Laure Napoléone on the town of Figeac (Fig. 3);<sup>9</sup> Gilles Séraphin has written authoritatively on Aquitaine<sup>10</sup> and Maurice Scellès and his colleagues on the town of Cahors (Fig. 4).<sup>11</sup> Several of our younger members presented their results in university dissertations and theses, such as Gaël Carré in Anjou and Touraine,<sup>12</sup> or under the auspices of regional public services as has done Marie-Ève Scheffer in Maine.<sup>13</sup> Carpentry is an important constituent of our field of study though publications are not as numerous as we might wish;<sup>14</sup> the work of Jean-Yves Hunot is a notable exception.<sup>15</sup>

The multidisciplinary approach of our research has numerous facets of which three stand out: above all the archaeological investigation *in situ* of standing buildings accompanied by detailed descriptions, precise drawings and serious photography; secondly, the study in parallel of surviving documentary sources; thirdly the absolute dating by the technique of dendrochronology of oak timbers. All three are used to varying degrees.



Fig. 2. Aydon Hall, Northumberland. On the left is a two-storey chamber block, the crenulation of which is probably original (*circa* 1290). To the right the first-floor hall, *circa* 1300, replaces a timber ground-floor hall, with nave and aisles, of thirteenth-century date. The crenulations was added after 1305. *Photograph: Philip Dixon.*

When we first began to take interest in seigneurial domestic buildings, some forty years ago, the technique of dendrochronology was practically inexistent in France. We launched the technique in Brittany in the early 1980s in collaboration with Dr Jon Pilcher who had previously made a start by establishing a preliminary reference chronology for the Loire Valley. Starting effectively in virgin territory, it took several years and much patience to establish a basic reference chronology. Persistence brought rewards and dates slowly began to emerge. At about the same time the laboratory at the University of Besançon began to develop the technique and to exercise a notable influence, especially in eastern France. We were later to benefit from their expertise in our work on the town houses of Cluny. More recently further progress has been made in the *Grand Ouest* thanks to the Dendrotech, a laboratory established at the Université de Rennes I. Efforts at absolute dating have not only been finally successful in Brittany, but also in Anjou and Maine. As in the British Isles, the technique has led to results of the first importance.<sup>16</sup>

Multidisciplinary research, with close collaboration of those involved, is an enriching experience. Active research does not stand still; it is essentially evolutionary. In our fields of interest the recording of surviving buildings and structures is fundamental, providing the factual basis on which hypotheses and ideas are developed. One consequence of active research is that it may rapidly become out-of-date as new ideas and hypotheses are worked through; that is to be welcomed as a sign of scientific vigour and vitality. We believe it to be the case.

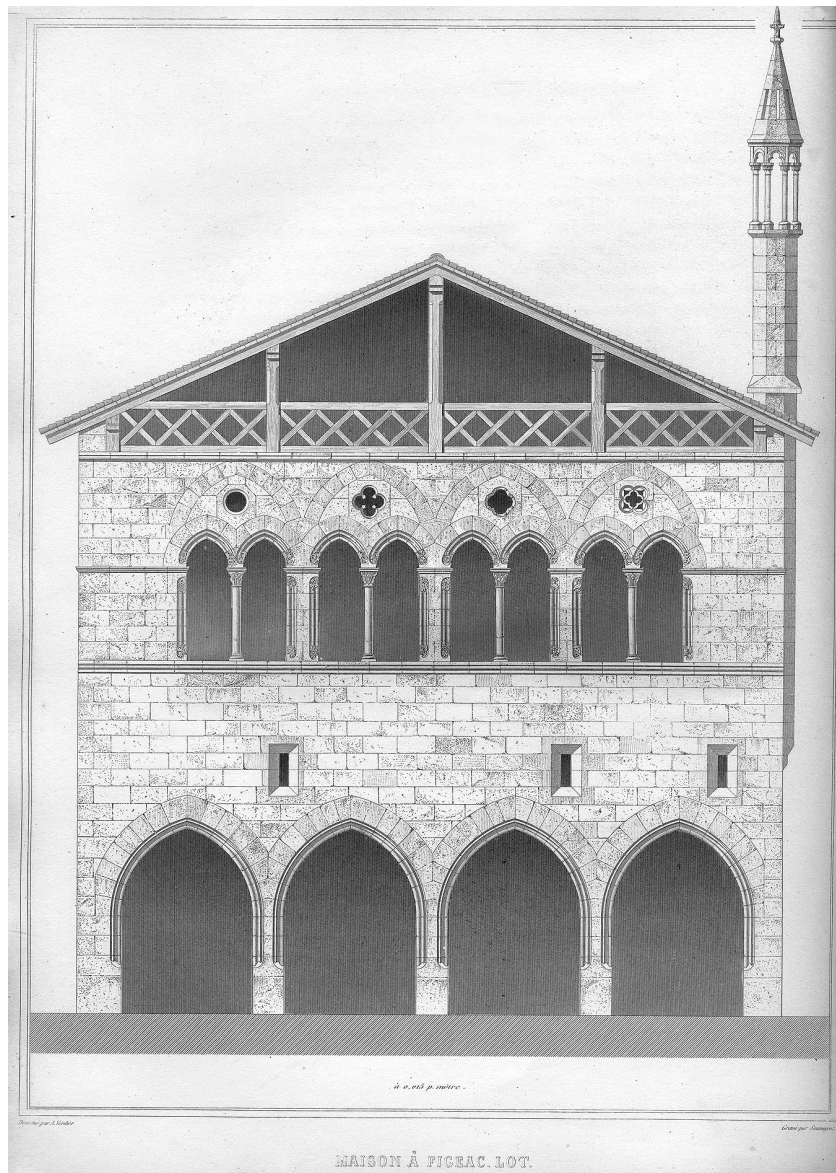


Fig. 3. Figéac, Lot. A thirteenth-century town house with arcaded ground floor and residential first floor with a single chimney-piece. *After Verdier and Cattois 1855.*

We are concerned with the residences of the aristocracy in the widest sense, hence our subtitle ‘halls, chambers and towers’, the three principal and characteristic elements of high-status buildings. Great importance is attached to the precise recording of a structure to a high level of accuracy, to the bringing to light of hitherto unknown documents, and—whenever possible—to the absolute dating of timber by

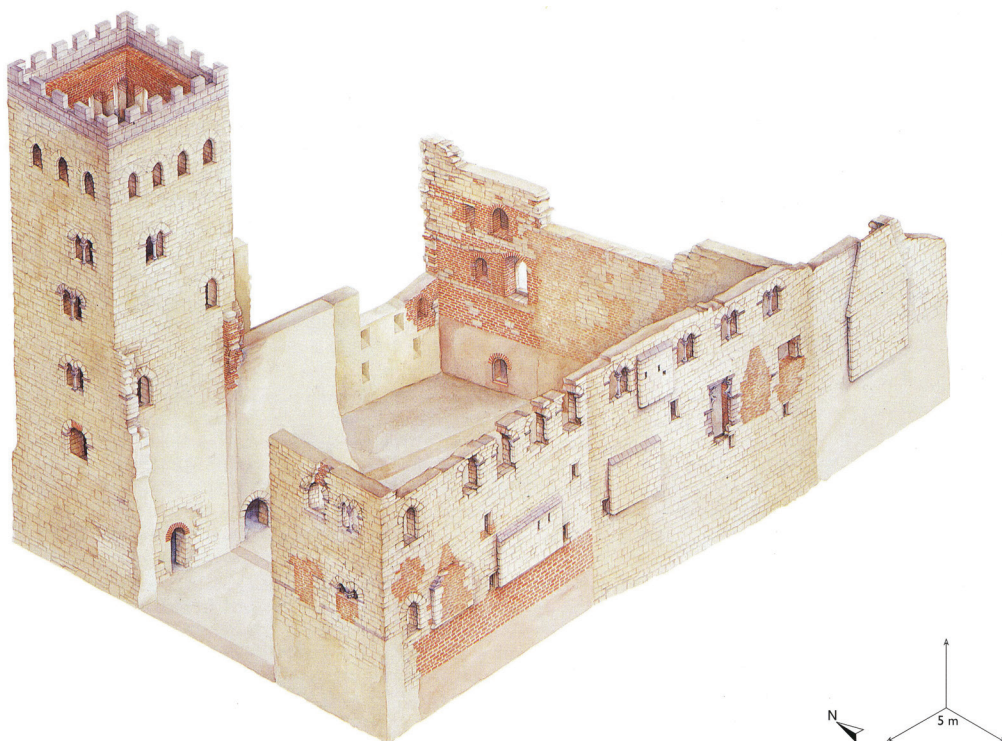


Fig. 4. Cahors, Lot. The Palais Duèze is one of a number of great town houses dominated by a residential tower. *After Maurice Scellès et al. 1999.*

the technique of dendrochronology.<sup>17</sup> Current results form a platform on which the next generation of researchers may build. Whilst our most recent published work concerns those regions once dominated by the Plantagenets, or has a close association with their former territories (Fig. 1), it is not our intention to suggest that there is a specific architecture associated with the Plantagenet world. There can be no precise frontiers; the diffusion of cultural phenomena does not respect those limits, political or otherwise, determined by man. The diffusion of styles is the product of contacts between men; time alone witnesses the ebb and flow of cultural factors. Passing from one province to another one often notices a progressive transformation of stylistic expression and the use of building material; such a process may best be described as cultural mutation. Further research may eventually show how these powerful princes influenced architectural practice and stylistic evolution.

Much domestic architecture of regions once under Plantagenet influence has yet to be the subject of serious study: Poitou and Charente are notable among them.<sup>18</sup> The heartland region of Normandy has yet to be fully exploited and published: Upper Normandy (*Haute Normandie*) awaits serious attention as does the Orne and much of the Cotentin where exciting discoveries have recently been made. Whilst there are frequently fine published studies of individual buildings, syntheses of whole regions or topics are relatively rare in contrast to the works of synthesis on developments in medieval ecclesiastical architecture in the Anglo-Norman kingdom or Plantagenet domains.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, we can reasonably claim to have acquired a broad understanding of the Plantagenet world. Notwithstanding the work of the

RCAHM Wales, notably in Glamorgan, Wales too is ripe for a new appraisal of its aristocratic residences, particularly in the medieval period.

Our research has not been limited to the Plantagenet world in its narrowest sense and although generally our work is confined principally to the period from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries,<sup>20</sup> we have ventured into later centuries. Recently published work by colleagues include syntheses covering a wide area; on medieval England (Fig. 5),<sup>21</sup> on Brittany,<sup>22</sup> Anjou (Fig. 6)<sup>23</sup> and Aquitaine (Fig. 7),<sup>24</sup> and on the urban residences of the *Grand Ouest* (Fig. 8).<sup>25</sup> Others have taken a specific theme: the small but important group of timber aisled halls in the southern part of England (Figs 9–10);<sup>26</sup> the seigneurial residences of Maine<sup>27</sup> and the Sarthe,<sup>28</sup> and—very importantly—the recent discovery of internal galleries in south-western Normandy (Fig. 11).<sup>29</sup> The functioning of domestic accommodation in the greater houses of Anjou remains a topic that arouses discussion and a certain divergence of opinion (Fig. 12).<sup>30</sup> The evolution of domestic space towards the end of the Middle Ages is a preoccupation of several colleagues. Recent publications by others are concerned with individual buildings, several—the great hall of the dukes of Normandy in Caen (Fig. 13),<sup>31</sup> the palace of the counts of Maine at Le Mans (Fig. 14)<sup>32</sup> or that of the archbishops at Tours<sup>33</sup>—are structures of the highest importance. In their time, they must also greatly have influenced the lesser nobility of their regions, in the latter case illustrating additionally how the great figures of the church constructed their residences on models similar to those of the major aristocracy.

Buildings previously unpublished include the great gatehouse of Asnières in the Sarthe (Figs 15–16),<sup>34</sup> and the restoration of the ensemble of Moullins, near Alençon.<sup>35</sup> Other accounts concern buildings rather at the limit of the Plantagenet zone—or beyond it—in Indre-et-Loire and Eure-et-Loir.<sup>36</sup> Aquitaine is represented by a treatment of Plantagenet towers,<sup>37</sup> as well as by a recent study of an astonishing collection of fortified mills (Fig. 17).<sup>38</sup> Important thematic studies include the origins of the manor in the *Grand Ouest* (Fig. 18), a topic bound to stimulate further investigation and full of implication for the interpretation of early manorial sites,<sup>39</sup> and a study of roof structures before 1450 in Anjou, a pioneering study which, we hope, might stimulate research on carpentry in other French regions (Fig. 19).<sup>40</sup> Finally, the use of probate and other inventories among surviving documents, is—inevitably for the later periods of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries—aptly dealt with, illustrating just how important is the study of such material for a fuller understanding of the functioning of domestic accommodation.<sup>41</sup>

## HALLS, CHAMBERS AND TOWERS

It is the aristocratic residence, in the widest sense, which is our common interest, that which explains the subtitle ‘halls, chambers and towers’, the three principal constituents that characterize these high status residences. The hall is the centre of communal life of an estate, the chamber is not only where the lord sleeps, but also the room in which he receives his family and others close to him. The tower is a symbol of seigneurial power, but may equally serve as a residence and a refuge at time of need. Symbolism is everywhere. This was no democratic society, rather one in which status and power were paramount, often greedily and lustfully so. Château and manor-house were centres of power: here it was that the principal figures of medieval society were to be found; it was in these residences that were expressed the political ambitions of the period and decisions taken, where intrigue flourished, where alliances were formed and compromises reached. The never ending struggle for social ascendancy, the ebb and flow of power that determined the prosperity, the wealth of an estate, a region or a province were played out. Raw competition was to be found in earnest, friendships sealed and enemies made. The ambition of a medieval lord was not just to look down on his domain and its inhabitants—his followers, whose well-being largely

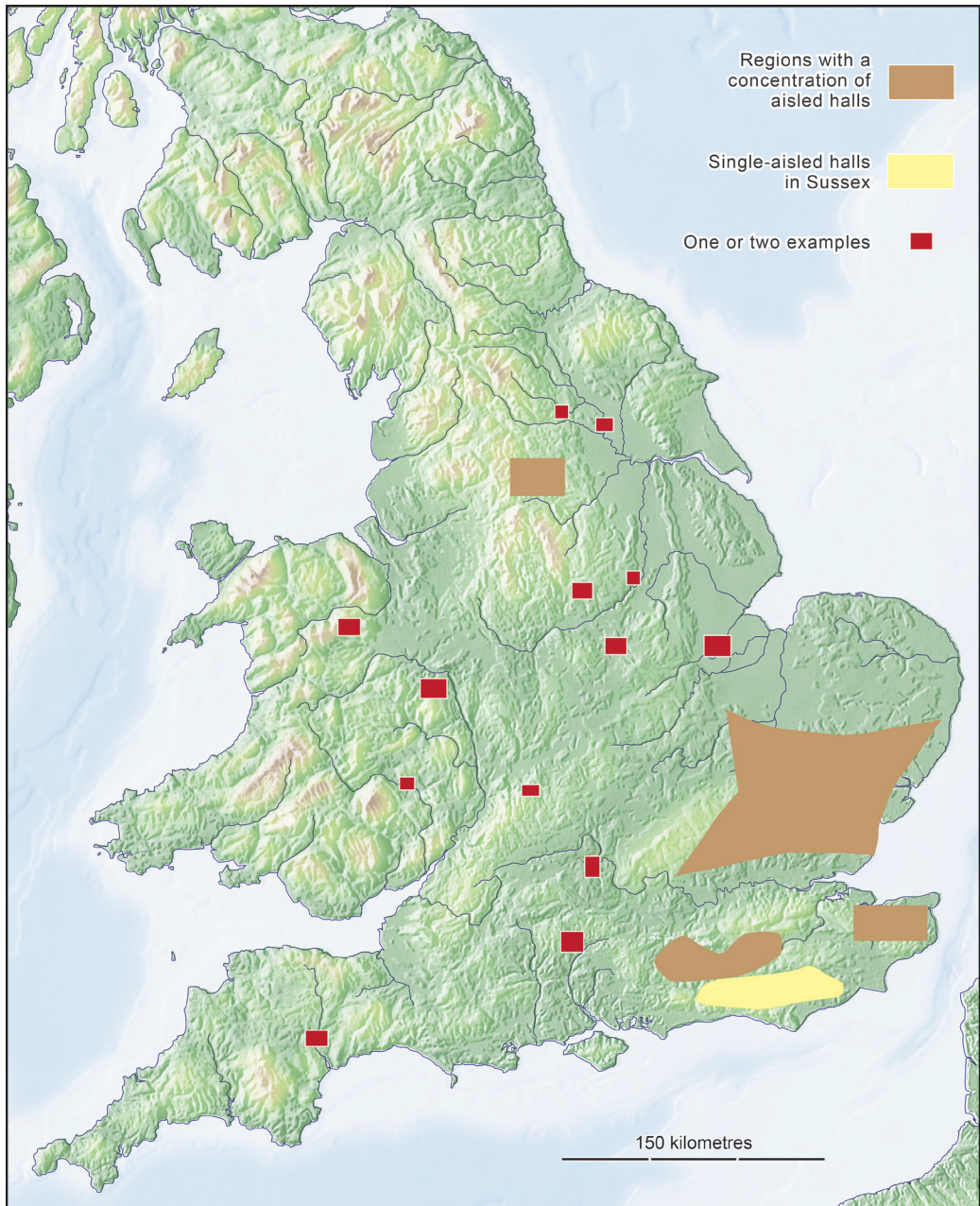
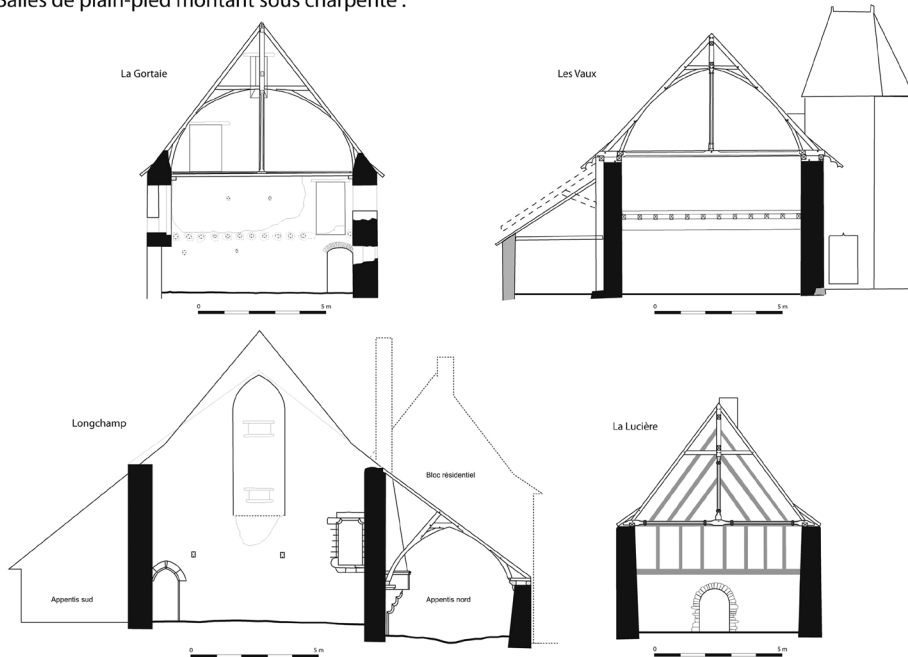


Fig. 5. Distribution of aisled halls, showing their preponderance in Essex and the south-east of England, with isolated examples in Yorkshire. Almost all are earlier than the fifteenth century. The small group in south Yorkshire are anomalous, including much later structures (up to the sixteenth century); most of the latter have only a single aisle as do those near the south coast of England. *After Sandall 1986, revised Dixon 2013 with additions. Cartography: Don Shewan.*



Salles de plain-pied montant sous charpente :



Salles hautes et semi-hautes :

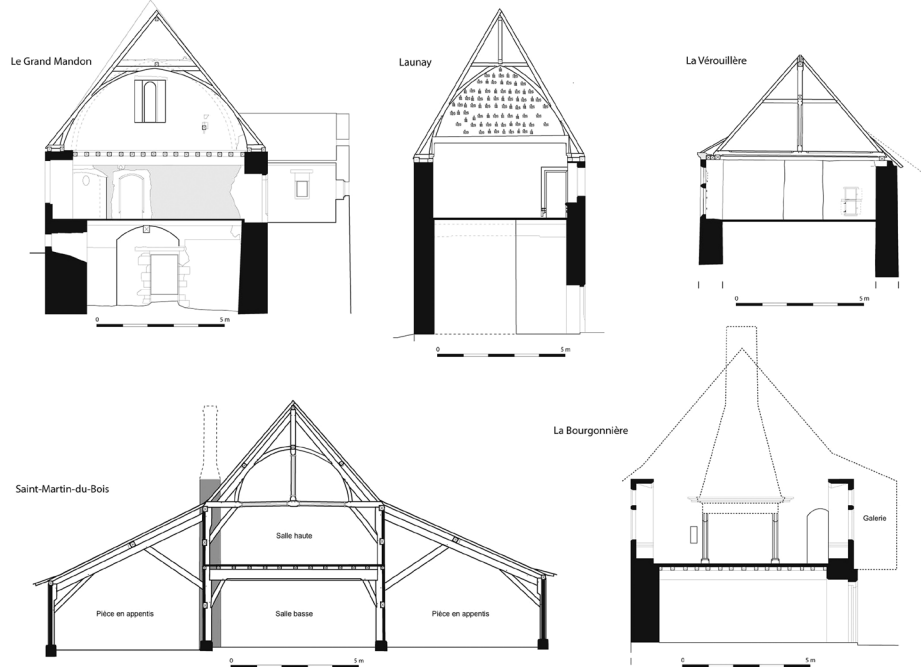


Fig. 6. Collar-rafter roofs of manors in Anjou. (A) Vilgué, Vieil-Baugé; (B) Juigné-la-Prée, Morannes; (C) Juigné-la-Prée, Morannes; (D) La Gortale, Louvaines. *After Jean-Yves Hunot.*

depended upon him—both physically and metaphorically, but also on the neighbouring aristocracy.<sup>42</sup> In the Middle Ages power and prestige of a monarch or a noble was expressed in the magnificence of his court and of his household, the elements of which, by their richness, was an expression of this state. The court of the duke of Burgundy was particularly sumptuous, but those of the dukes of Brittany, of Anjou and of Bourbon were close rivals. Within the limits of their means—and sometimes notwithstanding limited means—every noble even of the lower end of the spectrum sought thus to exhibit his wealth and power.<sup>43</sup> From that was born the passion which led to the building of towers, each new edifice seeking about all to rise higher than those of the neighbouring nobility who sought to emulate the best. It is thus unsurprising that noble families constructed residences which expressed their power and ambition, in close relationship to their lifestyle. It is the presence of a hall and a chamber which distinguishes the noble residence from that of the peasant.

Some of the greatest of these residences possess one or more upper great halls, in addition to numerous chambers. The smallest surviving manor-houses consist of a ground-floor hall with an adjacent upper chamber, often placed above a semi-sunken cellar or a kitchen. Occasionally the kitchen is located at the rear of the main range; so far we have failed to identify any detached kitchens in France at the social levels studied. This model we refer to as the ‘seigneurial minimum’, the ground-floor hall and the upper chamber being its essential elements.<sup>44</sup> In effect it is the minimum necessary for the aristocrat to raise himself above the level of his social inferiors. The noble held court in the hall and slept and received his family and close acquaintances in the upper chamber, whilst the peasant—in Brittany until a date late in the twentieth century—passed the greater part of his time in a multi-functional single room which served as kitchen, living room and chamber; the entire life-cycle of the peasant, from birth to death, was lived in this single-cell environment.<sup>45</sup>

Nevertheless, the grouping of hall, chamber and tower was subject to various solutions. In a perceptive article Dixon stresses the essential differences between the northern and southern regions of England; among these is the predominance of the great ground-floor hall—open to the roof with visible carpentry—in the south and that of the tower house in the north.<sup>46</sup> Like all generalisations this is subject to exceptions, but it must be regarded as essentially true. The great hall—which symbolised seigneurial power—also existed incorporated within the tower-house, though often—even usually—at first-floor level. In central and southern England it is the ground-floor hall which attracts attention and it finds its counterpart in France, notably north of the Loire. Those cultural factors which led to the development of the tower-house in the north of England, seem also to have been present in the south-west of France where the great freestanding hall is replaced by a hall in a fortified tower-like dwelling. The distribution of the freestanding ground-floor hall may be largely contiguous with what, for lack of a better term, we might call the Anglo-Norman world (pre-1154); that is to say that it is found in the heart of what became the Plantagenet zone.<sup>47</sup> In the earliest known manorial enclosures the ground-floor hall is the fundamental unit associated from the tenth century onwards with the motte and bailey. It is probably from the second half of the fourteenth century, generally, that the disparate elements of the medieval manor began to be brought together under a unitary roof, creating a dwelling in which it was possible to move from one room to the other without necessarily having to go outside. The implication is that the earlier freestanding great hall was in itself undefended and impossible of defence; for security it had to be sited within a fortified enclosure, an expensive matter. In contrast, the tower-house, although it may have been provided with a surrounding enclosure, was in principle self-defending, and whilst not necessarily more expensive, had the added advantages of formidable aspect and prominence in the landscape. The difference between the two is fundamental. Essentially, they represent different structural/design solutions to a common problem, raising important questions as to why the one form was chosen rather than the other. More research is needed before further light can be cast on this problem.

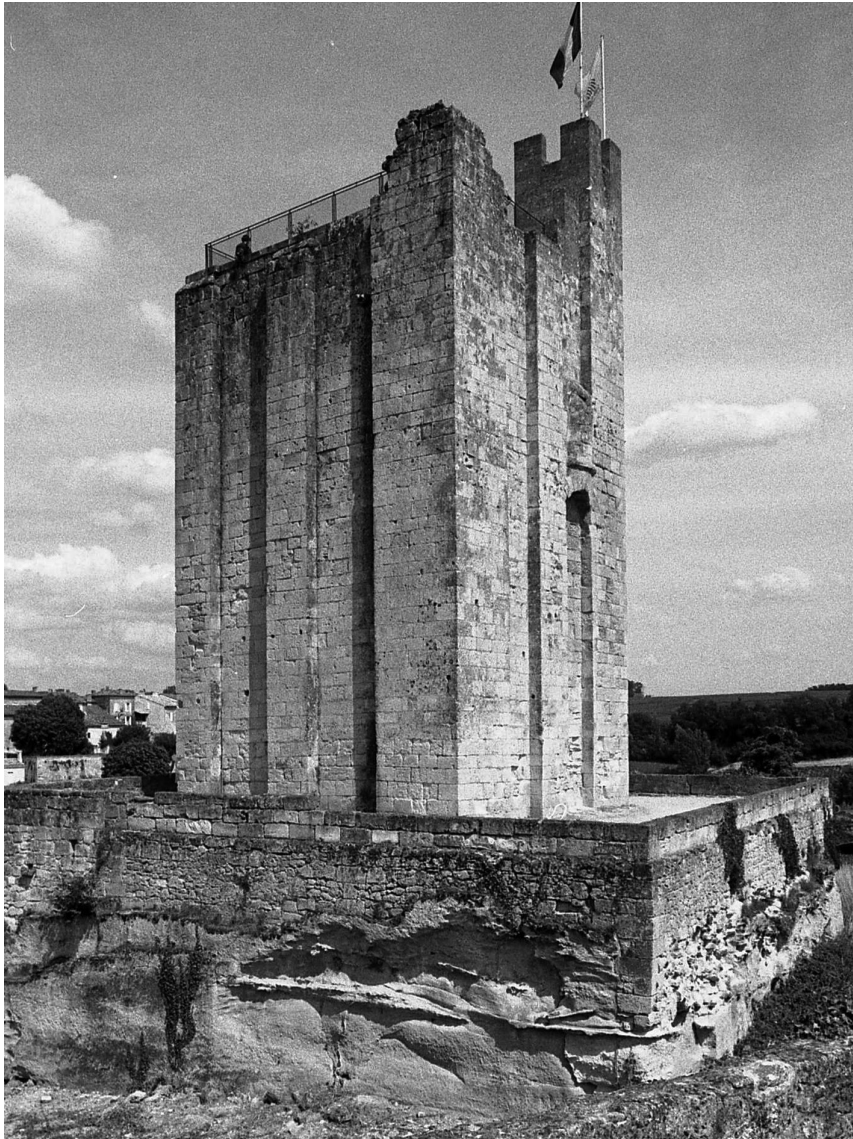


Fig. 7. Saint-Émilion (Gironde): the tower of the 'Château du Roi'.  
*Photograph: Gilles Séraphin.*

In central and southern England the great ground-floor hall holds sway at the heart of the residence as is also the case in the *Grand Ouest* of France, particularly north of the Loire. The ground-floor hall was 'the place of daily life of men and women, the place where each ate, drank and chattered about insignificant matters, sometime indecent, even often guiltily, the place where sometimes reprehensible acts are committed, where dogs run freely or sleep in corners, soiling the hall with their droppings'. Such



Fig. 8. Chartres: canon's house, 29 rue Chantault. The wealth and elaboration sculptured detail is extremely fine. Twelfth- and early thirteenth-century houses of similar quality are to be found in many French towns. *Photograph: Pierre Garrigou Grandchamp.*

were the admonishments of Robert Grosseteste, the great bishop of Lincoln, reprimanding William de Warenne, earl of Surrey, *circa* 1250, for having authorized the celebration of Mass in the great hall of his manor.<sup>48</sup>

The survival of the great ground-floor hall, with all its functions, also raises questions. It is obvious that communal living in such a space lacks privacy and it is in the nature of man to seek—increasingly with the passage of time—personal space and a private life away from the noise and bustle of the great hall. Impey has recently analysed in great detail the surviving evidence for the great hall of the dukes Normandy in Caen (Fig. 13),<sup>49</sup> a hall only surpassed in the Anglo-Norman world at the time of building—as far as we know—by the royal hall of Westminster.<sup>50</sup> Some later English halls were bigger (e.g. Canterbury) as were others in France: Poitiers, Angers and Paris, for example. These halls are the supreme statements of power and privilege. Thousands of structures, similar in principle, were built by lesser lords each according to his power and wealth, real or imagined. William I began the construction of Winchester castle almost immediately after the Conquest, *circa* 1067. The present hall, built of stone with Purbeck marble piers, dates from 1222–36 and is the finest surviving medieval hall in England after Westminster (Fig. 20).<sup>51</sup> At a more collegiate level is the Brethrens' Hall of the Hospital of St Cross, Winchester,<sup>52</sup> in use for its primary function within living memory; among its features are the open hearth, the gallery over the lower end and, at the upper end, the stairway rising to a private chamber (Fig. 21). Indicative of the more modest—though still ambitious—level of the Welsh gentry are the halls of Cochwillan and Penarth Fawr. The former (Fig. 22) is a magnificent stone and timber structure with the upper gable jettied over the

dais thus emphasizing the symbolism of the upper, seigneurial, end. Penarth Fawr is a more modest and, curiously, boasts a spere truss, providing a functional separation of hall and service end (Fig. 23). Both these Welsh halls have lateral chimney-pieces.

We have a strong impression that this dominant feature of the medieval residence went out of use—or declined progressively in its importance—in France before it began to decline in England. In England the process was well under way by the late fourteenth century, when the poet William Langland, in *Piers Ploughman*, deploras (probably about 1370) the growing tendency for lords and their ladies to withdraw from the hall and live more private lives in their chambers; they were slowly abandoning the practice of maintaining a great household and thus providing for a whole community of servants and the poor. But it was a long time dying and to this day many great houses retain the tradition of lunching and dining in hall, some on a daily basis. Paradoxically, numerous ancient English institutions maintain into the

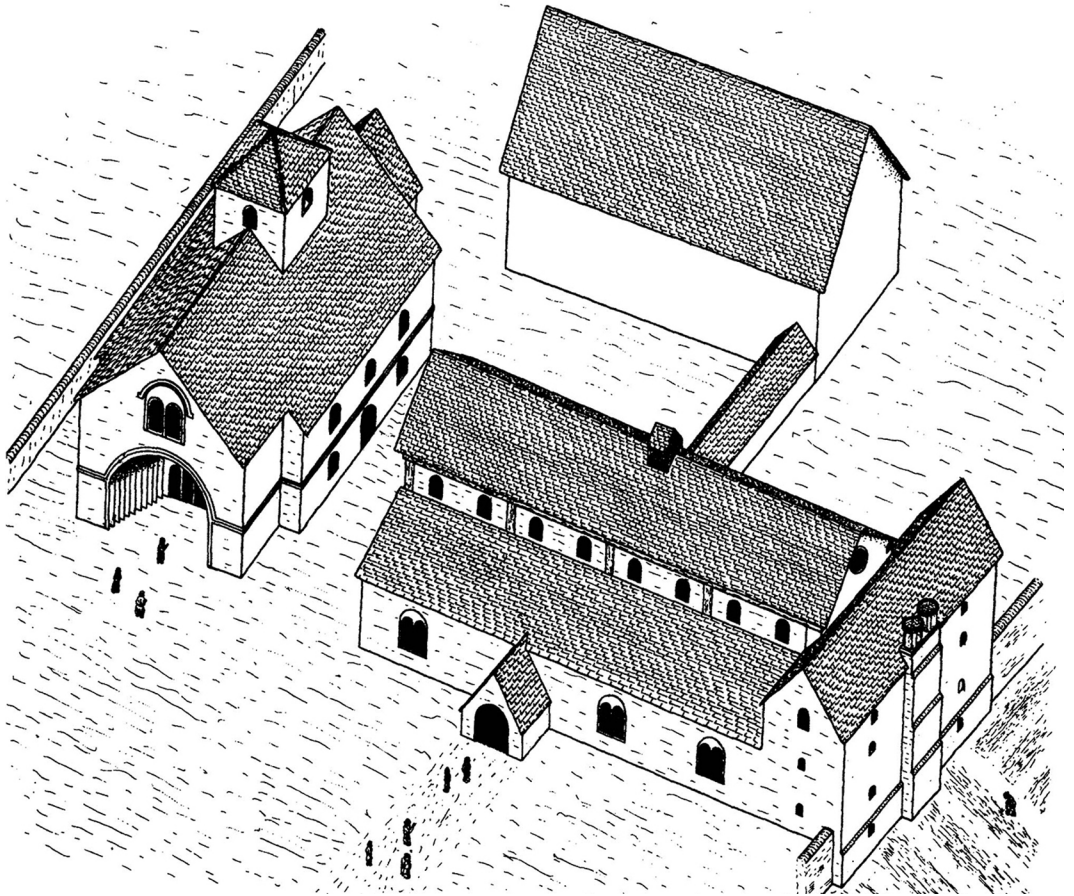


Fig. 9. Hereford: Bishop's Palace. A restitution of the probable layout of the palace in its original state. The timber aisled—with a clerestory—is linked directly to a chamber block at the upper end. Much altered over the centuries, the timber hall, dated by dendrochronology to *circa* 1179, remains at the core of this episcopal residence still in use as such today. *After John Blair.*

twenty-first century the practice of dining ‘in hall’. That the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge do so is well known, but so do the great London livery companies as well as the Inns of Court. Clearly, the communal need to meet at table and share food is the key factor in the survival of the great hall, whereas in France the tradition appears to have completely disappeared. That the ruling elite and the ruled should meet on a regular, or even on an occasional, basis to fulfil a basic human need—and that major houses deliberately retained prominent edifices so to do—is probably a crucial factor in the relatively peaceful evolution of a society.

Whilst we have offered a range of approaches and styles, and go beyond the Plantagenet world in its narrowest sense, our work is mostly confined to the period from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries, venturing into later centuries where we feel it to be necessary. It is a matter of regret that surviving documentary material is deficient for many of the edifices and regions which are studied.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, it needs to be emphasized that the buildings are themselves documents, a form of historical archive every bit as important—or frequently even more so!—as the surviving (or lost!) documentary material of the written archives. Most of the structures presented in this article are not the work of a single period but have been the subject of modification, renovation and restoration over a long period of time. They are veritable palimpsests and require the trained analytical eye of the archaeologist to lift the later layers in order to reveal earlier forms and structures. This technique is comparable to that of the palaeographer who seeks to penetrate the documentary palimpsest in order to arrive at an earlier version of—or an entirely different—text. Our structures are also an integral part of the landscape and must never be studied in isolation; the landscape is our greatest palimpsest—of inestimable importance—all too often awaiting analysis for the first time.

Overall, our hope is that we introduce the reader to new buildings and new interpretations, aspects of architectural and social history, methodology and approaches—but just as importantly—to stimulate the multidisciplinary study of the medieval house and all it can tell us. We can reasonably claim to have acquired a broad understanding of the regions here represented which we offer in the hope that others may be encouraged and inspired to carry the boundaries of research further.<sup>54</sup>

#### SITE AND SITUATION; MOTTES AND EARLY PROTECTED ENCLOSURES

Among the earliest known seigneurial sites emerging from the Middle Ages are the mottes with associated enclosures of the ‘motte-and-bailey’ type. Apart from their intrinsic interest they are relevant to our inquiries since they are frequently located close to existing manors and may indicate continuity of occupancy over a long time span. Meuret, for example, refers to the possibility that some mottes are directly related to earlier Iron Age and Bronze Age settlements (Fig. 18).<sup>55</sup> Some were undoubtedly intended for use only in time of war, and certainly supported timber towers. Others have a larger surface area but rise only a metre or two above the adjacent land surface. Here the possibility of residence must seriously be entertained.<sup>56</sup> The point at which a motte-and-bailey site ceased to be used on a permanent basis and the chief seigneurial residence shifted to a largely undefended manor-house, either on an adjacent or a new site, has yet to be established in all but a few exceptional cases. This ‘descent from the motte’ displays considerable temporal and spatial variations.

In Brittany, for example, at Quillimadec (Ploudaniel, Finistère) a fine motte is located on a flood-plain surrounded by meadow but the associated manor now lies several hundred metres away, above the valley at the junction with arable land. The same is true at Leskelen (Plabennec, Finistère) where the later manor house lies a considerable distance from the stone-clad motte and associated bailey famously excavated over thirty years ago by Job Irien (Fig. 24).<sup>57</sup> In contrast, at Le Châtellier (Saint-Samson, Côtes-d’Armor)

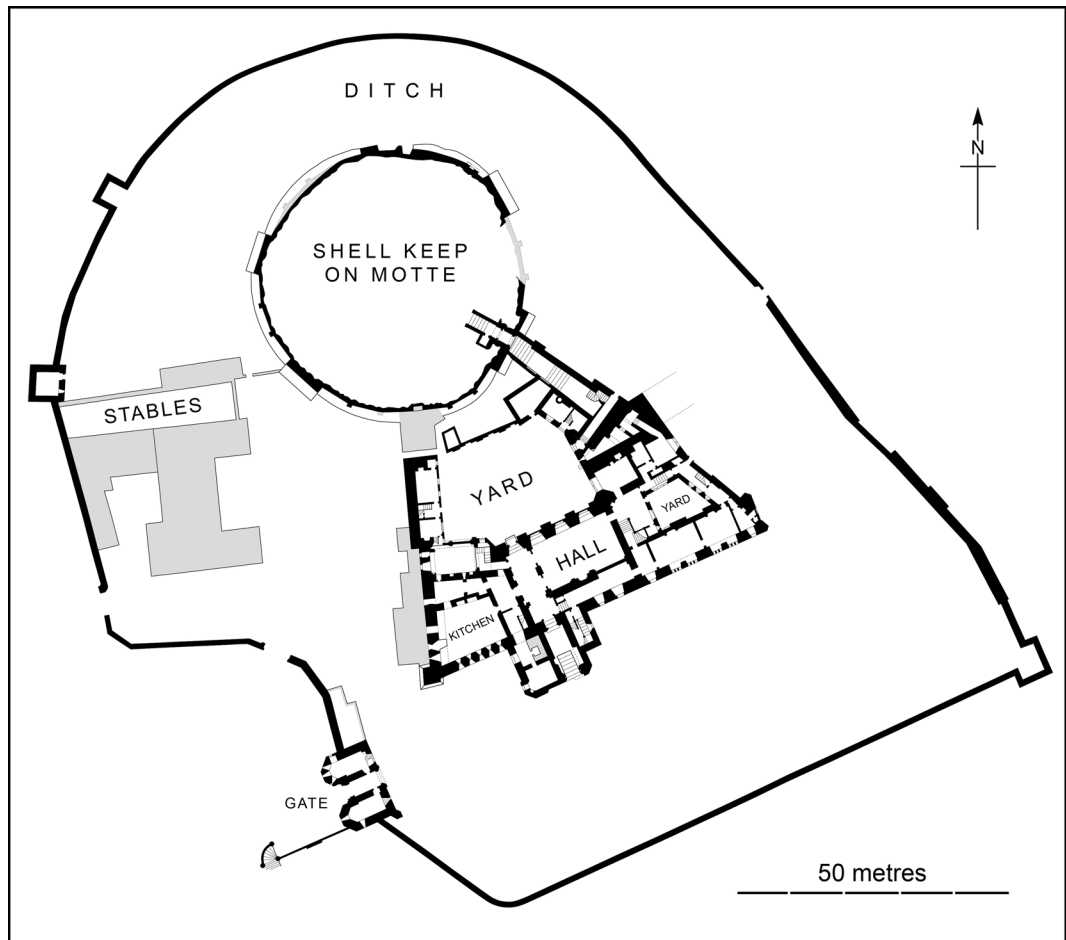


Fig. 10. Farnham: Bishop's Palace. The timber aisled hall is at the heart of a castle the origin of which is an eleventh-century motte. The bishops of Winchester ceased to reside in this, their principal residence, in 1926, but the hall survives at the centre of a much evolved residence. Dendrochronological analysis of one of the aisle posts has provided a date within the range 1180–1225. *Don Shewan, after VCH Surrey.*

the sixteenth-century manor lies within the original outer bailey, with motte and chapel on either side of the entrance from the tree-lined avenue (Fig. 25). Montgermont (Ille-et-Vilaine) retains its impressive motte close to the parish church in the centre of the present *bourg*, a testimony to continuance of occupation (Fig. 26). Many others may be cited.<sup>58</sup>

Documentary and archaeological evidence shows that some mottes continued in use, albeit on an occasional basis, until the fifteenth century. This is the period from which many surviving manors date, especially, from the last stages of the Hundred Years' War or its immediate aftermath. It may be that some, perhaps even many, of these manors represent the first attempt to occupy a largely undefended site beyond the motte-and-bailey. Others may occupy sites never intended for defence. In the absence of many excavated motte ensembles, the extent to which the outer bailey remained inhabited after the mottes



Fig. 11. Manoir de Lerre, Champcervon (Manche). A lateral gallery in the hall provides access to the chambers. *Photograph: David Nicolas-Méry.*

fell out of regular use remains unclear.<sup>59</sup> There is more than a suspicion that some estates are the lineal descendents of land already in cultivation during the Gallo-Roman period, so favourably sited are they on high-quality land at the junction of arable and meadow where the water table assures a plentiful supply of water throughout the year.

That evolution we have termed ‘the descent from the motte’ occurs over several centuries. Many early sites seem not to have been mottes, but defended enclosures on higher ground. These too witnessed a shift to lower ground, being abandoned in favour of new-built stone residences with all the appurtenances of the late medieval manor highlighted above. Water features strongly in these new settlements: moats, lakes and fishponds. Whilst it is almost impossible to date with precision many of these sites, we suspect on general grounds that the movement began in the twelfth century and probably continued until the end of the fifteenth century or even later. For comparison, we may note that in medieval England the majority of surviving moated manorial sites date between 1200 and *circa* 1340, with a few later outliers.<sup>60</sup> Moats provided some defensive protection, particularly from theft, but were also strongly symbolic of a noble residence. Most self-respecting noblemen needed a moat as a statement of position and wealth. On the other hand both lakes and the fishponds had important economic functions, the former a part of the defensive system, often linked to the moat, the latter assuring a supply of fish. The lake also—and most importantly—provided a head of water for the powering of mills, one of the greatest source of revenue on the demesne. Very good examples of existing manors where earlier earthwork sites survive nearby are Le Plessis Josso (Theix, Morbihan), Mesneuf (Bourgarré, Ille-et-Vilaine), and Le Bois Orcan (Noyal-sur-Vilaine, Ille-et-Vilaine). At Mesneuf the chapel survives, not in relation to the present manor, but at the entrance to the earlier earthen fortification, a remarkable example of the persistence of a sacred site.<sup>61</sup>



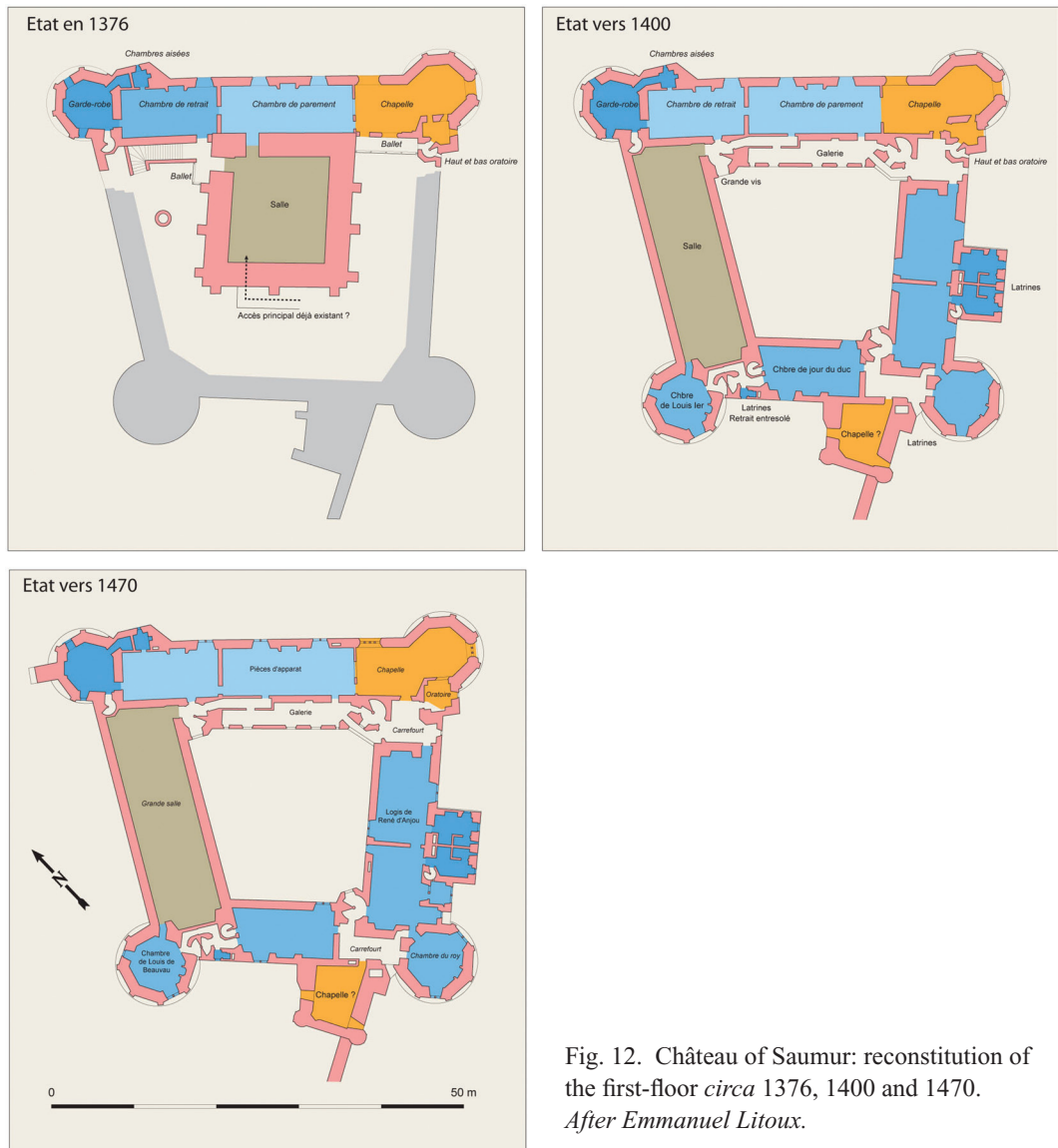


Fig. 12. Château of Saumur: reconstitution of the first-floor *circa* 1376, 1400 and 1470. *After Emmanuel Litoux.*

#### EVIDENCE FOR HALLS BEFORE 1400

Documentary and archaeological sources enable us to cast considerable light on the Great Hall as the physical centre of aristocratic life. It was the essential feature of domestic architecture in Western European from the immediate post-Roman period to the early modern period. Archaeological evidence for the existence of such halls in Anglo-Saxon England has been spectacularly revealed by excavations at Yeavinger (Northumberland) and Cheddar (Somerset), or, on a lesser scale, at Goltho manor (Lincolnshire).



Fig. 13. Caen: L'Échiquier seen from the east, dominating the site of the palace of William the Conqueror. The ensemble, with the exception of the upper part of the three bays visible on the right is almost entirely original, though there are traces of subsequent modification during the Middle Ages, in particular the remains of a chimney inserted to serve a building attached to l'Échiquier during the fourteenth century. The 1960s building, visible on the left, masks a vaulted structure added in the twelfth century. *Photograph: Edward Impey.*

The Venerable Bede's famous simile—likening man's life to the brief flight of a sparrow coming in from the storm into the heat and warmth of the hall before flying out into the darkness—is well known.<sup>62</sup>

Early documentary evidence for houses, generically termed *domus*, and inhabited across a wide social spectrum, is chiefly provided by saints' lives, toponymy or charters.<sup>63</sup> Saints' lives survive in increasing number from the seventh century onwards, though most are of later origin, a matter which raises the possibilities of linguistic and terminological anachronism. In Brittany evidence of toponymy with place-name elements such as the Breton, *lis/les* (cf. Welsh, *llys*) meaning court or seigneurial residence, *bot/bod* likewise found with the same meaning in Breton and Welsh, is rich though it remains to be fully exploited for our subject. As Bernard Tanguy has recently shown there are other nuances to be explored: in some instances, for example, *tigorent/tiorent* signifies a rural manorial site, though not invariably so.<sup>64</sup> As for charters, most famously those of the cartulary of Saint-Sauveur de Redon, also provide a rich harvest with a much more specific chronological framework.

Some 350 Redon charters, dating from the ninth and tenth centuries—preserved by transcriptions of the mid eleventh or early twelfth century—allow us to observe social conditions in a zone where Breton and Frankish influences vied for precedence.<sup>65</sup> In it the Latin form *aula* is often a synonym for the

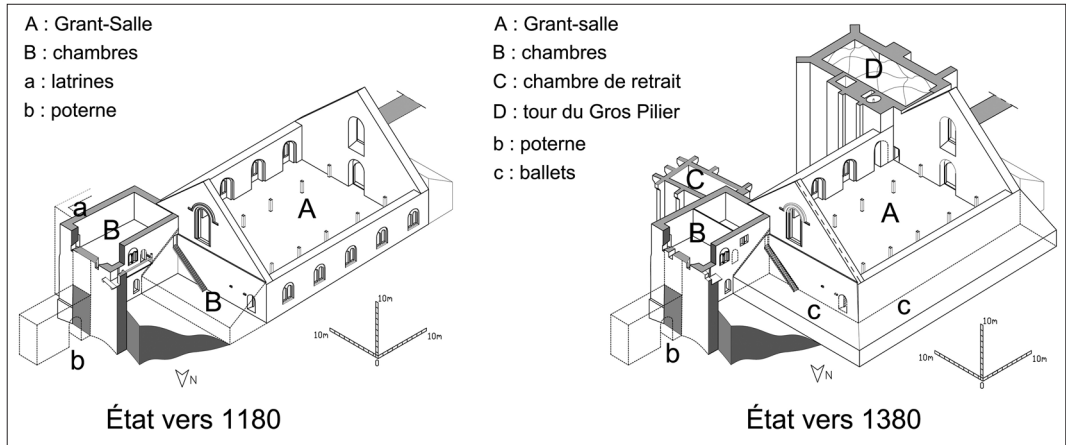


Fig. 14. Le Mans: the palace *circa* 1180 and its evolution *circa* 1380. After Nicolas Gautier.



Fig. 15. Asnières-sur-Vègre (Sarthe). The southern façade of the great gatehouse, overlooking the courtyard. The row of corbels originally supported a gallery. Photograph: J. Mastrolorenzo.



Fig. 16. Asnières-sur-Vègre (Sarthe). The eastern upper hall with its carpentry of 1293–95. This is a very good example showing clearly the how the delicate tie beam, whose function is to prevent the rafters from spreading, is supported by the fine king-post; they are thus both in tension. Vestiges of the once elaborate mural decoration is evident in the plasterwork. *Photograph: J. Mastrolorenzo.*

Breton/Welsh *lis*, context showing that in some cases such *aulae* were places where justice was administered by local leaders, *machtierns*, as well as serving as private residences. None has so far been certainly identified in the archaeological record though we may suspect that many of them occupy sites where a later seigneurial presence is demonstrable.<sup>66</sup> Another cartulary which contains significant amounts of early material, that of the abbey of Landévennec, is less helpful for our purposes, transposing into earlier centuries terms and conditions that relate to the central, rather than to the early, Middle Ages. On the other hand, the cartularies of Sainte-Croix de Quimperlé (Finistère), Saint-Georges de Rennes and Saint-Melaine de Rennes (Ille-et-Vilaine) as well as others dating from the twelfth century, provide important additional evidence for seigneurial habitations in the duchy of Brittany at large. Along with surviving original charters, this is the best documentary evidence we have for the homes of those exercising authority whether as dukes, counts, great lords or—more modestly—as knights, since the evolution of terms encountered in earlier centuries may be followed and new terms emerge.

At the highest level, that of the dukes and their leading vassals, *castrum/castellum*, for instance, almost always now signifies a major fortified site, a castle. *Aula* is sometimes also used as a synonym for a castle, but otherwise refers to what was quickly becoming one of its principal features: the great hall. The physical form of such sites varies according to location and resources. Some, as noted above, began as low-lying natural or artificial mottes surmounted by a modest tower of wood or stone—or both—



Fig. 17. Moulin de La Salle à Cleyrac (Gironde). Photograph: Vincent Joineau.

surrounded by a bailey in which subsidiary buildings are found. Such sites have been identified in Brittany by archaeology from the late tenth century onwards. Others, taking advantage of rugged physical features—an escarpment, an isolated hill or cliff top—appear to have been built in stone from the outset, though the existence of postholes at the castle of Fougères (Figs 27–28), indicating a primitive wooden tower preceding a late twelfth-century stone donjon, shows that development is often a complex matter.

Fougères also provides the best excavated example in Brittany of an early great hall (*aula*), dating to the twelfth century (Fig. 27).<sup>67</sup> Mention of *aulae* at other major sites—Josselin (Morbihan), Châteaubriant (Loire-Atlantique), Ancenis (Loire-Atlantique), La Guerche (Ille-et-Vilaine) and Nantes (Loire-Atlantique)—probably took a similar form. By the end of the century, separate chambers in which the head of the household and his wife slept and in which they probably also received family and intimate visitors, *camera*, are occasionally mentioned in Breton sources. The *thalamus* next to a tower at Fougères—and another in which a charter was drawn up at Vitré (Ille-et-Vilaine) in 1172—may have served either as a bedroom or as a treasury. The Latin *manerium* begins to become common from the twelfth century, as does its French equivalent *manoir* from the later thirteenth, for a seigneurial residential complex.

*Aula*, as a term to describe either a whole castle or a separate hall within it, fell out of fashion in Brittany in the early thirteenth century. It was eventually replaced by *salle* which first appears in toponyms, only occurring in written sources with reference to the great hall of a manor gradually in the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Archaeologically, different forms of *salles*, timber-framed or stone-built, can be identified from a much earlier point at the social level of the *manoir*, as well as in that of the higher Breton aristocracy. *Maison* and *hostel* are terms that also come into usage in the later Middle

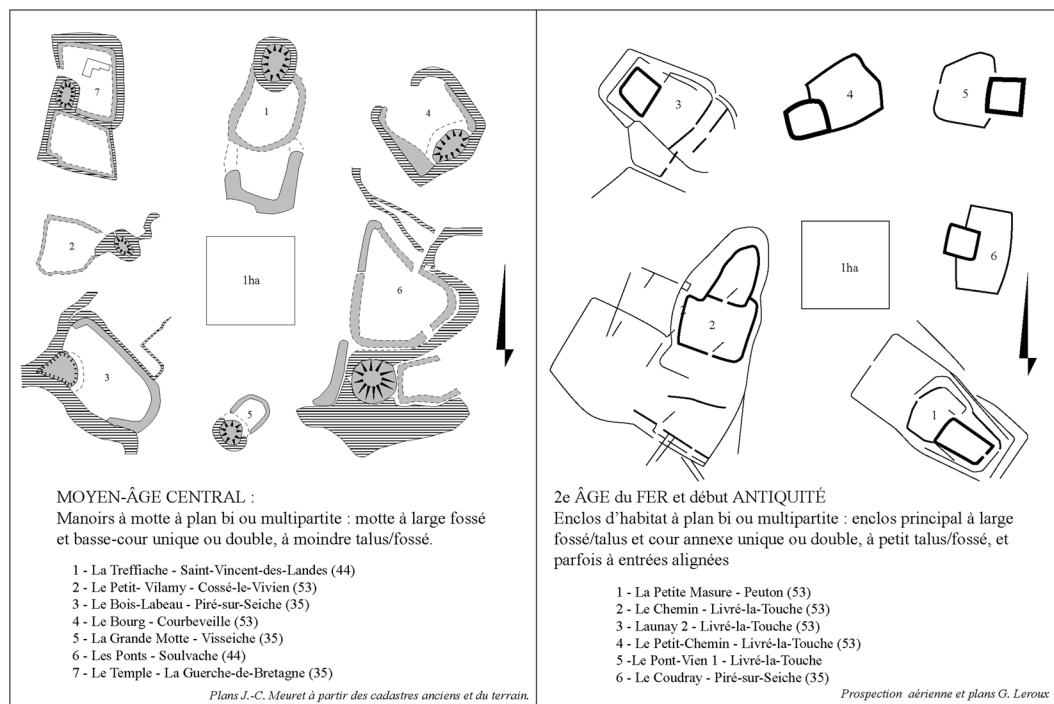


Fig. 18. Comparative evidence of manorial sites in (left) the central Middle Ages and (right) the Iron Age and beginning of the Gallo-Roman period. *After Jean-Claude Meuret.*

Ages.<sup>68</sup> In the case of *maison*, some were modestly fortified tower-houses of which an increasing number are now being identified archaeologically. Depending on context, *domus* was also used in this sense in the thirteenth century, but it could also be used, as it was at La Goulet (Finistère) in 1341, to describe the whole manor.

## RESIDENTIAL TOWERS

Residential towers are ubiquitous and notably so in the southern parts of the Plantagenet world. Thus we have the elements of the seigneurial residence contained as separate buildings with the enceinte of the motte and its fortifications: hall and chamber, chapel, kitchen and other domestic offices. The popular image of the motte would have the tower, first perhaps of timber construction but later built in stone, housing the private quarters of the lord and his family notably in times of danger. It is not difficult to imagine why such a family yearned for life at ground level without the tedium of climbing steps and the relative confinement of life in a modest tower. It is well established that, in England, the later medieval manor-house came about through the bringing together of the disparate elements of earlier seigneurial enclosures: hall, separate chamber block, kitchen and lesser offices.<sup>69</sup>

At Coadélan (Prat, Côtes-d'Armor), a spectacular example dominates the seigneurial lake, entry to the early primitive tower, with its few window openings, may originally have been by an external stairway

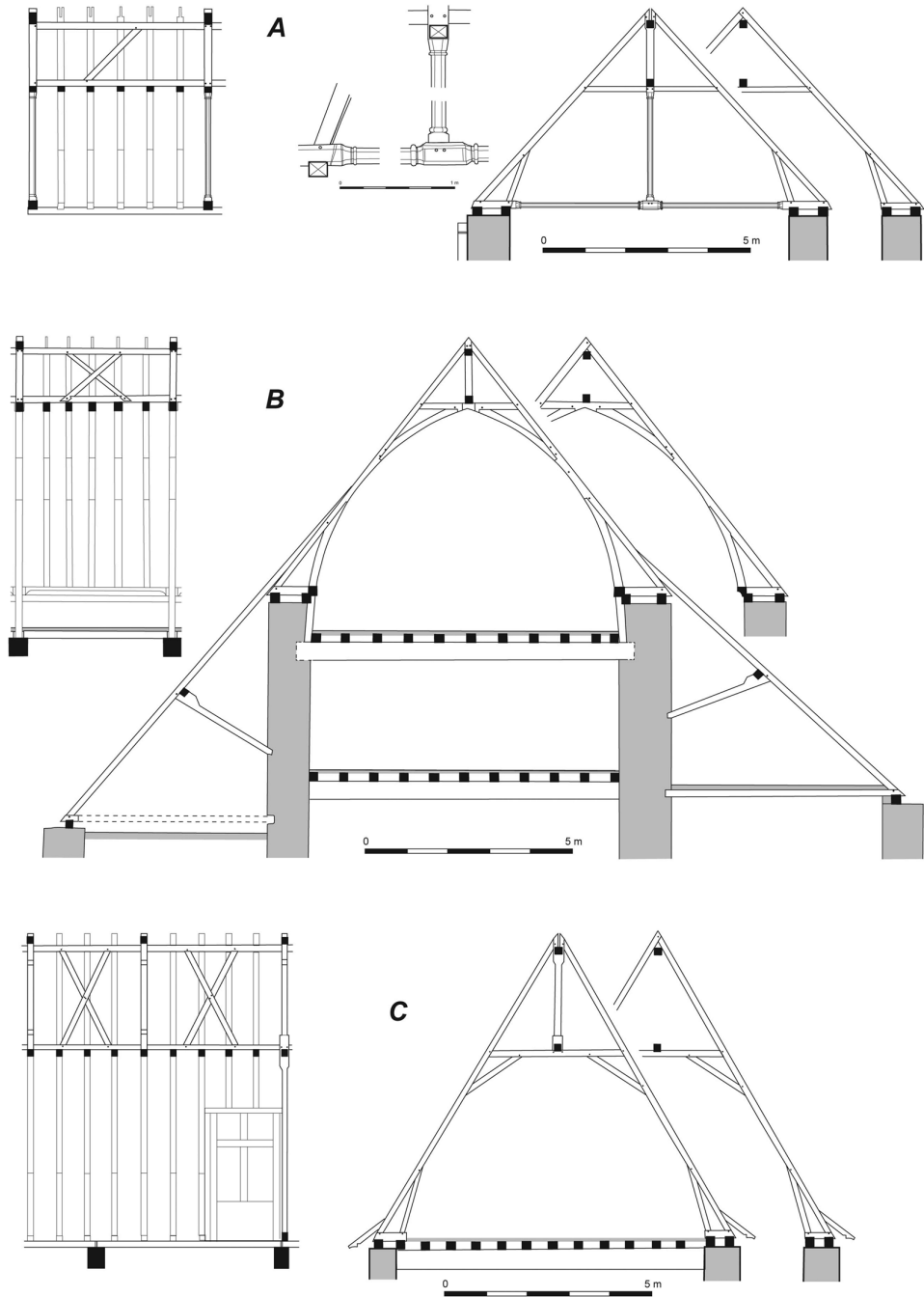


Fig. 19. Anjou: collar-rafter roofs from manorial sites. (A) Logis Plantagenet, abbey of Saint-Maur-de-Glanfeuil, Le Thoureil; (B) Clairefontaine, Le Vieil-Baugé; (C) Le Belligan, Sainte-Gemmes-sur-Loire. *After Jean-Yves Hunot.*



Fig. 20. Winchester, Hampshire. First built by William the Conqueror, *circa* 1087, the present structure of 1222–36 is the finest surviving medieval aisled hall in England after Westminster. *Photograph: John Crook.*

rising to a doorway at first-floor level: this tower seems never to have been accessible from the outside at ground-floor level (Fig. 29). A second, western, tower contains a chapel on the ground floor and is of much later date, probably the sixteenth century, added to the hall range providing architectural balance. This building yielded dates of 1305–27 for the kitchen and 1362–90 for the cross-passage. It is thus possible to envisage the construction in added to an earlier stone tower. From the evidence of the stonework it is clear that the kitchen was built against the pre-existing stone tower. The latter must therefore probably date from the thirteenth century, or even from the twelfth.<sup>70</sup>

But it is further south in the Plantagenet world that some of the finest residential towers are to be found. Their early inspiration may have its origins in Italy; the many towers of San Gemignano, Tuscany, are well known (Fig. 30). The probability is that many French towns were similarly endowed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; a number of tower houses have recently been identified in Tours.<sup>71</sup> The great royal tower of Vincennes is well known; that of Largoët is probably the tallest surviving seigneurial tower in France, though some of those of the south-west are of similar scale (Figs 31–32).





Fig. 21. St Cross, Winchester, Hampshire. The Brethren's Hall, within its open hearth, was in use as a dining hall within recent memory. *Photograph: John Crook.*

### CONSTRUCTION: STONE AND TIMBER

Surviving ground-floor halls are without exception rectilinear in plan, enclosed by four walls of stone. But that appears not always to have been the case as there is strong evidence of former construction in both timber and torchis. We have long argued for a former coexistence of timber and stone traditions.

In the Breton medieval countryside, as opposed to the towns, evidence of timber-framing has until recently been rare. Certainly there is evidence of more than just vestigial timber-framing in certain parts of the countryside at the lowest social levels during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. That timber-frame construction flourished in the towns does not prove that it was ubiquitous in the countryside, but it is an indicator.<sup>72</sup> Towns, generally, are rich in surviving timber construction. We have outlined, elsewhere, the evidence for a timber-frame tradition in Brittany.<sup>73</sup> The present distribution of surviving timber-frame



Fig. 22. Cochwillan, Tal-y-Bont, Gwynedd. One of the houses of the Griffith family of Penrhyn; late fifteenth-century. © Crown Copyright: Cadw, Welsh Government.

structures is strongly suggestive of a region once rich in this tradition but subject to regression over several centuries. The reasons are not difficult to understand. Timber is subject to weathering and decay on a scale unimaginable in stone construction. Furthermore the very assemblage of timber-framing is such that, once decayed it is often both easier and cheaper to cut away the old material and replace it with stone masonry.

Some manors retain vestiges of the timber-frame tradition. Whilst this stops short of providing irrefutable evidence of a widespread medieval timber-frame tradition in the countryside, a critical piece of archival evidence is available to cast considerable light on the problem. At Bienassis (Erquy, Côtes-d'Armor) there is documentary evidence for the reconstruction of the *château* between *circa* 1412–34 when new stone buildings replaced, amongst other things '*une vieille salle fondée sur postz de boays ou maniere de cohue*', in effect a timber-frame hall.<sup>74</sup> Witnesses in an inquiry held in 1434, from which these details are drawn, further testified how formerly '*ledit manoir estoit mal logé et y avoit une ancienne*



Fig. 23. Penarth Fawr, Llanarmon, Gwynedd. An important medieval hall with lateral fireplace. The spere truss is rare in Wales outside the north-east; it is an essentially English feature. © Crown Copyright: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales.

*salle gasté et vidé laquelle led. Geoffroy [du Quelenec] a fait tresbien reparer et ediffier*’ so that it had become ‘*un des beaux manoirs du pais et deparavant n’y avoit q’une vieille salle gasté de l’ancienne faczon*’. That this type of construction was then regarded as ‘old’ is evident from its having being built in *l’ancienne faczon*. The implication here is that the timber-frame hall was not only then an ‘old’ type but also ‘normal’ and therefore widespread (Fig. 33). *Cohue* is a term widely used for the aisled market hall of which several survive in Brittany and are, furthermore widely distributed: Clisson (Loire-Atlantique) and Questembert and Vannes (both Morbihan) in the south-east; Le Faouët and Plouëscat (both Finistère) in the north-west are good examples. Although these examples are of post-medieval date they are most certainly heirs to a long tradition. It seems certain, both from the reference to ‘posts of wood’ and by analogy with the market hall, that the hall of Bienassis was aisled. Here, then, is the first categorical statement in a fifteenth-century document—and irrefutable evidence—for the existence of the timber

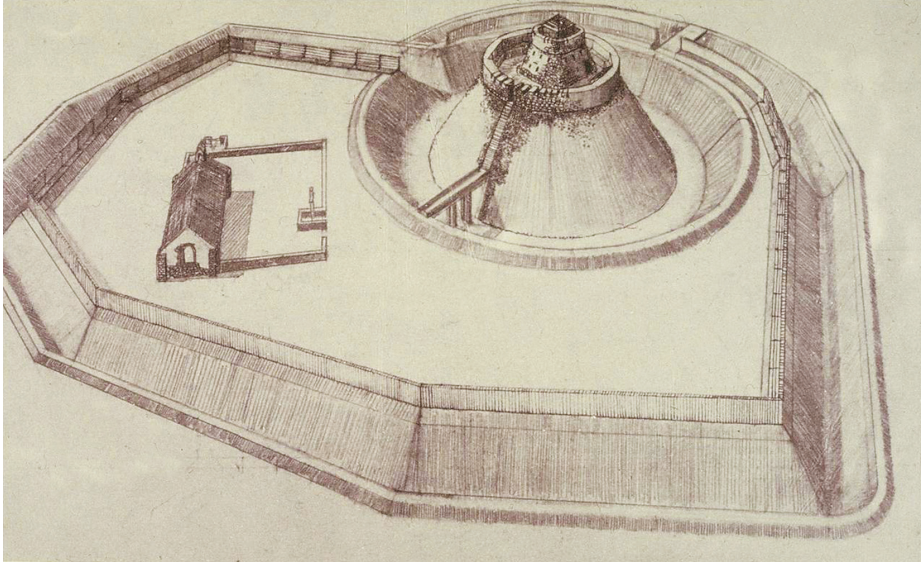


Fig. 24. Leskelen, Plabennec, Finistère. A reconstruction of the site based on excavation evidence. Note the residential tower on the motte, the deep ditch and the freestanding buildings in the bailey. *Jo Irien.*



Fig. 25. Le Châtellier, Saint-Samson-sur-Rance, Côtes-d'Armor. Here is a perfect example of a site with motte and bailey where the motte survives at the entrance to the courtyard and within which stands the fifteenth-century manor house. The castral chapel stands at the entrance opposite the motte, a classic location. *Photograph: Archives départementales d'Ille-et-Vilaine: fonds Meirion-Jones.*

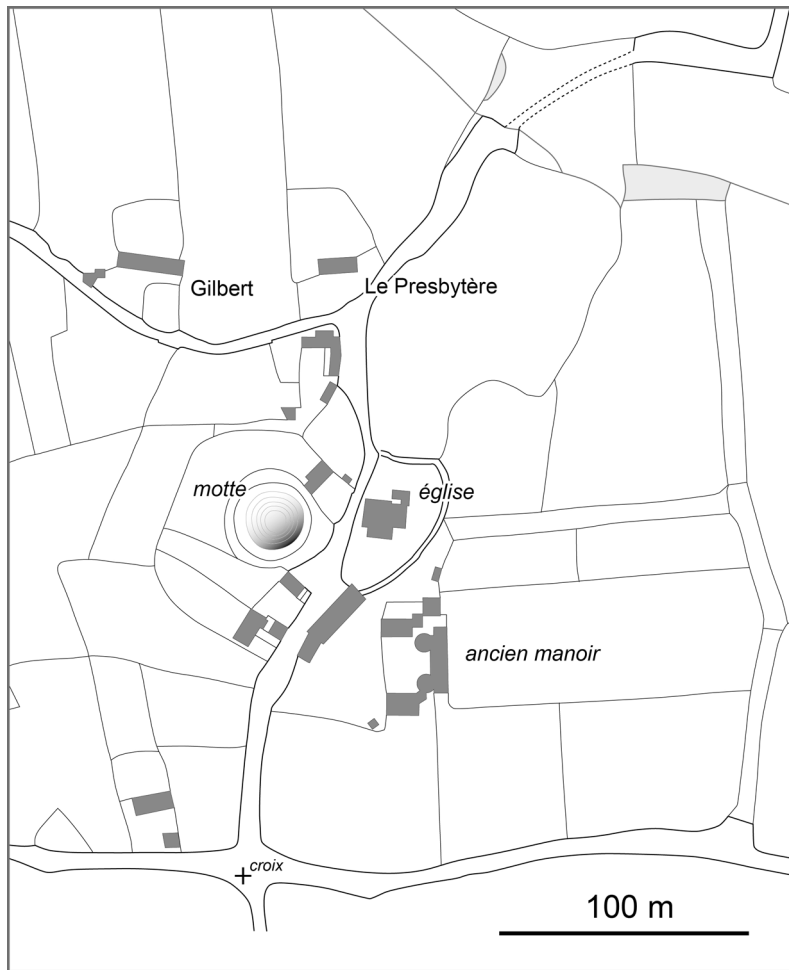


Fig. 26. Montgermont, Ille-et-Vilaine. Here is a classic site of motte and bailey almost unaltered. The present parish church stands within the former bailey and almost certainly succeeds the castral chapel on the same site. At an unknown date the main residence was supplanted by an unfortified manor house, now the *mairie*. Cartography: Don Shewan, after the cadastral plan of 1814, Archives départementales d'Ille-et-Vilaine.

aisled hall in rural Brittany at the social level of the manor-house. There can be little doubt that the timber-frame tradition, together with the aisled hall, was well-developed in late medieval rural Brittany; that it was also widespread elsewhere in the Plantagenet world remains to be demonstrated.

It is probably from the fourteenth century, even as early as the thirteenth, in certain precocious regions, that the separate elements of the medieval manor began to be drawn together under a single roof. It thus became possible to move from one room to another without having to go outside. For a large number of manors there is no structural evidence prior to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, suggesting either that they were newly-built at that time, or that whatever predated them has been completely swept away. There

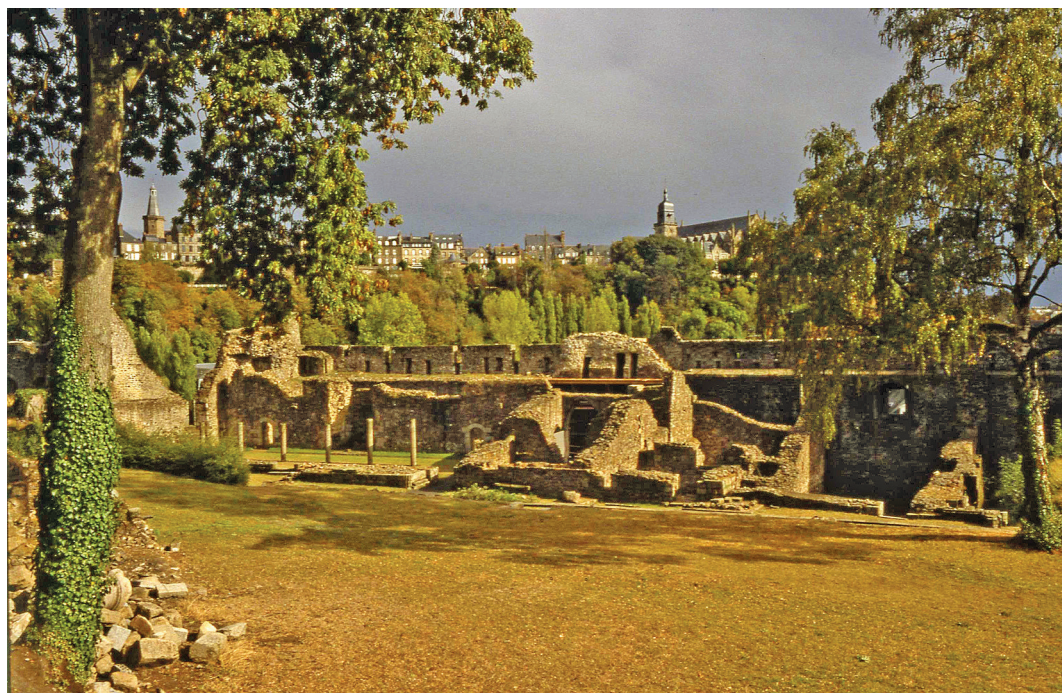


Fig. 27. Château de Fougères, Ille-et-Vilaine. Our photograph illustrates a great aisled hall (supposedly open to the roof) identified by the bases of the central arcade. *Photograph: Archives départementales d'Ille-et-Vilaine: fonds Meirion-Jones.*

are some instances, however, where both dendrochronology and archival evidence shows that earlier structures do pre-date the present buildings and that earlier material is incorporated into later surviving structures. On some mottes wooden keeps gave way to more durable stone towers. These, of both rectilinear and circular plan form, survive in some numbers.<sup>75</sup> They may be found all over the province and many earlier towers are incorporated into later buildings of both manorial and castle status. Boisriou l'Abbé (Cavan, Côtes-d'Armor), Coadélan (Prat, Côtes-d'Armor) and Suscinio (Sarzeau, Morbihan) are good examples. Elsewhere grander residential towers would remain popular especially at the upper levels of aristocratic society as the magnificent but seriously-threatened fourteenth-century tower at Trémazan (Landunvez, Finistère), the very solid ducal residential tower at Dinan (Côtes-d'Armor), built around 1382, La Tour Guesclin (Le Grand Fougeray, Ille-et-Vilaine), dating from the same period, or that of Largoët-en-Elven (Morbihan), the tallest surviving seigneurial tower in France (Fig. 30), achieving its final form in the later fifteenth century, clearly demonstrate.

#### CHAMBER BLOCKS

Surviving freestanding chamber blocks are not numerous though a few exist to provide an insight into what might once have been a much larger number. That at Boothby Pagnell is well known.<sup>76</sup> Brittany provides



Fig. 28. Château de Fougères, Ille-et-Vilaine. The great residential tower with, in the foreground, the remains of an earlier tower. *Photograph: Archives départementales d'Ille-et-Vilaine: fonds Meirion-Jones.*

a number of examples. At Le Fretay (Pancé, Ille-et-Vilaine) a chamber block stands in the courtyard of a small late medieval castle, already in the possession of the family of La Marzelière in the late fourteenth century. Two first-floor chambers, approached by an external stone stair, lie over an undercroft presumably intended for the accommodation of animals, almost certainly horses as the structure lies within the castle courtyard (Figs 34–35). These chambers, each provided with a chimney-piece, are provided with a very fine carpentry, of a transitional collar-rafter type; this we have dated by dendrochronology to the years 1440–42.<sup>77</sup>

Buildings of this kind were once widely referred to as first-floor halls, a confusion with the true hall at first-floor level which undoubtedly also existed in the Anglo-Norman world, though the Doyenné in Avranches appears to be a high status chamber block built for a rich ecclesiastic (Fig. 36); it bears strong similarities to the chamber block of Briquebec and Beaumont-le-Richard.<sup>78</sup> But it has been demonstrated, unquestionably, that many such structures previously held to be first-floor halls are upper chambers destined for the use of persons of superior social status.<sup>79</sup> Such freestanding chamber blocks



Fig. 29. Coadélan, Prat, Côtes-d'Armor. The tower on the extreme right is the oldest part of this manor; it is earlier than the halls in the centre which are of fourteenth-century date. It is almost certainly of the thirteenth century and possibly of the twelfth. *Photograph: Archives départementales d'Ille-et-Vilaine: fonds Meirion-Jones.*



Fig. 30. San Gimignano, Tuscany. A town well known for its magnificent assembly of twelfth- and thirteenth-century tower-houses. *After Verdier and Cattois 1855.*





Fig. 31. Largoët, Elven, Morbihan. This great residential tower was certainly completed by the mid fifteenth century. It would have been familiar to Henry Tudor—the future Henry VII of England—who spent many years in closely-supervised residence before returning to Wales in 1485 to begin his quest for the English throne. *Photograph: Archives départementales d’Ille-et-Vilaine: fonds Meirion-Jones.*

evidently came into being in order to provide private accommodation within the manorial or castellan enclosure, additional to that in the principal residence. Such a solution results in the provision of private chambers apart from the noise and bustle of the main house with its hall, kitchen, offices and domestic staff. The downside is that there is no provision for cooking or other domestic activity. It follows that those who occupied such chambers had to cross the courtyard for meals and social intercourse. These



Fig. 32. Caussade, Tarn-et-Garonne. The great residential Tour d'Arles.  
*Photograph: Gwyn Meirion-Jones.*

chamber blocks may well have originated from the need to provide accommodation for visitors and guests of rank, but they may also have served to house family members, either on a permanent or an occasional basis.

A variant on this theme is to be found at Kernac'hriou (Pleudaniel, Côtes-d'Armor), now demolished. It stood on one side of the courtyard, between the entrance—an extremely fine ashlar-fronted gatehouse which itself contains very little accommodation—and the site of the original hall, now occupied by a modern house. This was a detached chamber block with six chambers accessed by separate doorways. Such an arrangement would have permitted the use of the chambers as individual units, or as paired chambers, upstairs and downstairs; a system permitting a certain flexibility of accommodation. This is a true guest house, or lodgings range, somewhat reminiscent of an Oxford college with its staircase system. Dendrochronological analysis of samples taken from ceiling beams puts Kernac'hriou 'after 1554' a late date for the octagonal chimneys, but otherwise consistent with the architectural evidence.<sup>80</sup>

## RESIDENTIAL GATEHOUSES

Notable are the gatehouses, sometimes referred to as the *châtelet*, an important status symbol. In practical terms the gatehouse added to the security of the manorial compound, funneling traffic through a common entrance. It is the first structure to greet the visitor. That these buildings were impressive is evident at a number of Breton examples. Frequently, there was a residential function. The greatest surviving example is the *châtelet* of the ducal summer residence of Suscinio. Here the main ducal accommodation is in the gatehouse; the residence accommodation across the yard is composed of two chamber blocks devoid of domestic offices (kitchen, cellar, etc.). The *châtelet*, in contrast, is composed of four storeys, the lowest of which was destined for storage; other necessary offices are present. The ‘lower’ hall is at first-floor level and provided with chambers at each end. The two upper levels are respectively the apartments of the duke and, within the roof space, the duchess. This structure is a true *logis*; vertically, it is composed of a series of three apartments each with its hall—effectively a private hall—and chambers. Only at the first-floor level can the hall be said to be a common hall. The two upper levels are composed of a private hall, chambers, latrines and in the case of the ducal apartment, an *étuve*.



Fig. 33. Bienassis, Erquy, Côtes-d'Armor. An earlier manorial complex on this site was of timber construction, being replaced by this stone-built house between 1412 and 1434. *Photograph: Gwyn Meirion-Jones.*

At a more modest, but nevertheless impressive, level are manors with imposing gatehouses. Kerandraou (Troguéry, Côtes-d'Armor)—currently being restored—towers cliff-like above the approaching visitor;<sup>81</sup> Mezédern (Plougonven, Finistère) is another.<sup>82</sup> Kerandraou lies in a hollow, close to a tidal inlet at the junction of high-quality arable land on the one hand and meadow on the other. It is possible to trace the outline of the former courtyard and it seems that buildings here were all of stone though timber halls and other buildings may once stood within manorial enclosures of this kind. We have dated it by dendrochronology to *circa* 1395.<sup>83</sup> La Grand'Cour (Taden, Côtes-d'Armor) stands in a courtyard bounded by an enclosing wall and a row of dependent buildings, provides a similar model though aside from the entrance.<sup>84</sup> One of the finest examples must be that of Asnières (Figs 15–16).<sup>85</sup>

### THE INTEGRAL MANOR HOUSE

Many a seigneur built to the limit of his means, others—to judge by the number of unfinished projects—built without the means to fulfil their ambitions. Frequently, those without wealth made adventurous marriages and a spate of new building may mark the arrival of a new wife. Not only did marriage bring wealth but so too did prosperous agriculture, office at royal or ducal court or service in royal or princely armies.<sup>86</sup> Creative instincts, ambition and wealth, fuelled the construction—in Brittany, for example—of a multitude of noble residences almost without parallel in Europe in their number and quality.



Fig. 34. Le Fretay, Pancé, Ille-et-Vilaine. A double chamber block at first-floor level approached by an external stairway over a ground-floor space destined either for stabling or for storage. *Photograph: Archives départementales d'Ille-et-Vilaine: fonds Meirion-Jones.*

In later medieval Brittany the *noblesse* begin to become seriously evident in written and material sources from the twelfth century onwards, though links to the Carolingian period or even earlier origins are also likely, if not indeed probable. Lords played a considerable part in the making of the cultural landscape of the duchy. Certain of these families were of high birth and lineage, possessed considerable power and wealth and descended from dukes, counts and viscounts; others compare to the modest English gentry, proud of their knightly ancestry, but living modestly whilst managing their small estates. The proliferation and display of armorial bearings in the later Middle Ages and early Renaissance period serves to emphasize pride, noble descent and continuing social status.<sup>87</sup> These seigneurs were frequently opportunistic. Some became rich and famous, though many were later to languish on their small estates as an impoverished nobility.<sup>88</sup>

Unsurprisingly, families built residences to match their noble lifestyles: expressions of power and ambition. Whilst the record is undoubtedly incomplete, noble residences survive in considerable numbers, allowing us the chance to make detailed physical surveys. Combined with investigation of appropriate documentary sources and dating by dendrochronology of oak timbers, a considerable degree of precision in understanding individual buildings has been achieved in the past three decades. The residences studied in Brittany—*châteaux* and *manoirs*—have much in common residentially; all were possessed of, at least, a hall, an upper chamber and also usually a kitchen. Larger houses may have one or more upper halls as well as multiple chambers. It is the presence of a *salle* and an upper chamber which sets the noble residence apart from the peasant house. Our smallest surviving manors are composed of hall with an adjacent upper chamber, often located over a semi-sunken cellar or above a kitchen. A kitchen at the rear is a frequent occurrence though some of the smallest manors may have had no separate kitchen arrangements. We have already referred to this model as the ‘seigneurial minimum’ of which the hall and upper chamber are the basic essentials.<sup>89</sup> It is the very least by which the aristocrat might raise himself above those he considered his social inferiors.<sup>90</sup>

Here lies the sharpest of social divides, challenged only by wealthier merchants and entrepreneurs who sought to imitate the noble life-style by constructing houses with first-floor chambers, though not necessary by using them: symbols of aspiration and acquired wealth! We make no distinction—though recognizing differences of scale—between the *manoir* and the *château* since both are representative of a noble life-style and share the characteristics outlined above, the larger manors merging in scale into the smaller *châteaux*, a gradual mutation from one to the other. Popular perception may prefer to distinguish between *manoir* and *château* but, in our research, we regard any attempt to define them separately as arid and unhelpful. As a *corpus* they are a material expression of a continuum of wealth, social status and noble aspiration. This was a society within which lay great extremes and where, though relationships could be brutal, there is, nevertheless, abundant evidence of a civilised feeling for the arts; for music, dance, poetry and an appreciation of beauty and landscape. The latter are all too evident in the architecture of the province; there was also an increasingly strong attachment to nature; gardens and orchards were cultivated. Notwithstanding the squalor and poverty in which a majority of the rural population lived, there is much evidence that, at the upper end of the social scale, there was an awareness of hygiene and cleanliness. The nobility took their baths as surviving *étuves* testify;<sup>91</sup> they dressed with care, often luxuriously. It is too easy to forget that at all periods of history there is a small percentage of the population which can be described as fastidious in personal habits within the limits of their material circumstances.

Whilst little physical evidence of manorial building in Brittany survives from the twelfth century and not much from the thirteenth, manorial structures of this period are much more common in the neighbouring provinces of Maine, Anjou, Touraine and Normandy. It is with the fourteenth century that the record becomes clearer. The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were times of great rebuilding and renovation. For the most part, the earliest surviving residences are dwellings of high status; whilst it is true that they

were not 'built to last'—they were rather an expression of power and aspiration—the manner of their construction was such as to result in solid, durable, structures.<sup>92</sup>

Historically, man has invested his resources and aspirations in his home; houses provide reliable testimony to the ways of life and culture of their inhabitants. At the end of the Middle Ages there existed a large number of halls open to the roof, not only in Brittany but widely throughout the *Grand Ouest*. This was the 'standard' common hall in the noble residence. The roof carpentry was an expression of wealth, power and prestige, intended to be viewed and admired. The hall was the principal living space in the noble residence, usually accompanied by service accommodation and private chambers, the latter frequently storeyed. Unlike comparable residences in England and Wales, the hall in France was not separated from the service end by a cross-passage and screens; the 'embryo' cross-passage is always open to the hall in Brittany, without exception, though it may be—we have no evidence—that portable screens were sometimes used. Furthermore, there is remarkable conformity of plan throughout the *Grand Ouest* of France, representing the standard by which wealth and ambition were able to adapt to reflect the status of the builder.

Conformity of plan across so widespread an area seems surprising at first sight, until we consider the social standing of those for whom these houses were built, and the role and responsibility they assumed. We must imagine the hall in these houses as a forum for a public role—in short, a ceremonial space where status could be conspicuously celebrated. Halls were sites of display, demonstrated most notably in their chimney-pieces, their volume, their decoration and, notably, by the carpentry of their roofs. The extent to which conservatism and reverence for ancient tradition may have been a factor in the design and persistence of the hall, can be only a matter for speculation. In contrast to the hall, the chamber might be situated at either the upper or lower end of the hall and located either above a cellar, semi-sunken or not, and approached by a stairway. Some manors have an upper chamber at each end of the ground-floor hall. Since the latter was open to the roof there was no communication between the chambers at first-floor level; thus each chamber required its own stairway. The hall is always—without exception—the first element of the *manoir* to be constructed.<sup>93</sup> It was the principal status symbol announcing the presence of the lord. Here he held court, dined with guests, visitors and members of his household. It was in the hall that justice was dispensed and the estate administered.

An abiding feature of all halls lies in the distinction between the upper and lower end. Entrance was always by the lower end which in many cases in France may have had only a single doorway, though a pair of opposed doorways was common, the second leading usually into the rear courtyard but sometimes into a lateral kitchen or storeroom. The visitor, entering by the main doorway, would be faced by the open hall and fine carpentry; his gaze would be drawn to the upper end usually adorned by a monumental chimney-piece. Lateral chimney-pieces are known in many of the earliest surviving halls; such halls are usually held to be typologically, though not necessarily chronologically, earlier. The roof timbers were sometimes richly decorated but, even at the most modest level, it was usual for the armorial bearings of the lord to be displayed in carved or painted form above the lintel. The shield of arms announced to the visitor not only of the status of the lord but also that of his noble descent. Whilst furniture might be sparse, the principal table would be placed across the upper end, parallel to the gable wall.

This is where the seigneur took his place, at the centre of the table, facing down to the lower end of the hall, when receiving formally or dining in company. The distinction between upper and lower end is inviolable and unchanging throughout the Middle Ages; but the seigneurial presence is not tied to the location of the chimney-piece. The fact that most chimney-pieces are built into the upper gable easily leads to the false assumption that the seigneur always sits with his back to the fire. This is not so; he sits at the upper end of the hall, even when—as in not a few instances in the later Middle Ages—the chimney-piece is located in a lateral wall (or even takes the form of an open hearth in the centre of the *salle*).



Fig. 35. Le Fretay, Pancé, Ille-et-Vilaine. The roof timbers of this chamber block have been dated by dendrochronology to 1440–42. *Photograph: Archives départementales d'Ille-et-Vilaine: fonds Meirion-Jones.*

The great hall was not just the principal living space for the use of the noble household, it was also a meeting place for the whole community of the estate. Men came to the hall to hear the latest news and to exchange gossip, as is indicated in the records for Bienassis (Erquy, Côtes-d'Armor) in 1434.<sup>94</sup> The hall was frequented on a daily basis, not just on high days and holidays. It offered some hospitality at least to genuine travellers and no doubt particularly those of higher social status, as we see in 1468 at L'Hermitage (Lorges, Côtes-d'Armor).<sup>95</sup>

As for the existence of the 'open' hearth for the post-Carolingian period we know little, at least at the social level of the nobility.<sup>96</sup> Chimney-pieces are ubiquitous, certainly from the twelfth century onwards at the higher levels of society; at the lowest level there is evidence of their survival, exceptionally, in the twentieth century.<sup>97</sup> At manorial level we have so far only a single example which seems to have had an open hearth, that of Le Têhel (Saint-Symphorien, Ille-et-Vilaine).<sup>98</sup>

#### EVOLUTION OF THE ARISTOCRATIC RESIDENCE: THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY AND LATER

One of the principal modifications from about 1450 in the middle and lower range of the aristocratic residence is the insertion of ceilings in the hall, or the uppermost hall in houses of several storeys. It is well established that in central and southern England the Great Rebuilding occurred largely within the period 1560–1640. In France the phenomenon started much earlier, probably from about 1450 in the

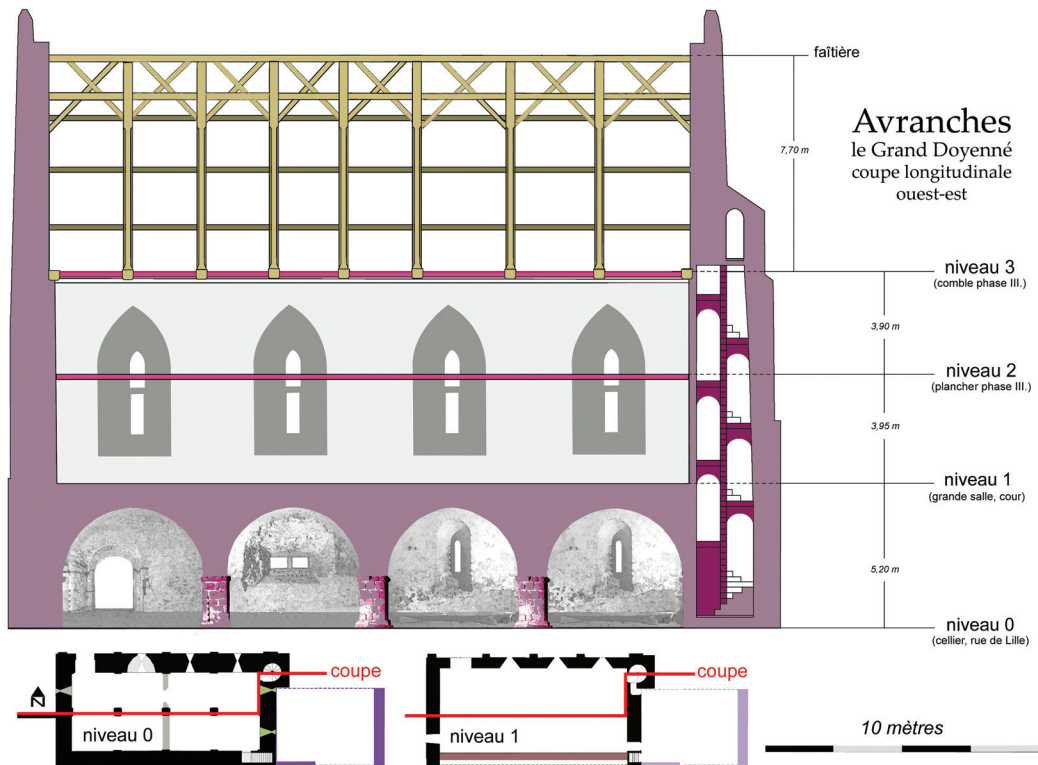


Fig. 36. Avranches, Manche: Le Grand Doyenné. A high-status chamber block constructed for a rich ecclesiastic. *After David Nicolas-Méry.*

*Grand Ouest.* In Brittany the years 1490–1660 saw the greatest activity with the insertion of ceilings which permitted circulation within the house at the upper levels; a consequence was that halls—and chambers—were warmer and freer of draughts. The numbers of chambers also increased, as did the greater provision of latrines. Although the L-plan is evident in the later Middle Ages, it is during the early Renaissance that it becomes common with the halls in one arm and kitchen and chambers in a second wing at right-angles to the first. A single stair turret in the angle of the two wings serves all floors. This is the period when an increase of privacy becomes most noticeable, not only in the increased numbers of chambers and latrine provision, but in the way that the residence frequently turns its back on the great courtyard with its dirt, dust and noise, and private apartments look out onto gardens and orchards at the rear. The addition of a *pavillon* (a Renaissance chamber block) to many medieval houses illustrates these developments as at Le Plessis Josso (Theix, Morbihan).

## CONCLUSIONS

The aristocratic residence displays much in common across a great swath of territory from the north of England southwards across northern and western France as far as the Pyrenees, a territory that



corresponds broadly with that once under Plantagenet influence. Both timber and stone construction are in evidence. The motte-and-bailey castle was widespread and undefended manors are to be found at an early date, not infrequently associated with a nearby motte and even in some instances earlier—sometimes much earlier—earthen, or earth and stone, structures. The residence is primarily characterized by the presence of a hall, commonly a ground-floor hall, that supreme and ultimate symbol of seigneurial presence and power, in which family, friends, visitors and guests were received. In the Plantagenet world the aisled hall and its successors are largely confined to the Anglo-Norman zone; in the northern parts of England it is the tower-house which dominates incorporating both hall and chambers. This pattern is repeated south of the Loire where the towers of the greatest magnates were great features of the landscape.

At a more modest level hall and chamber are arranged with the lord's chamber over a semi-sunken cellar or, more frequently, a kitchen. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries these rooms were usually arranged in a line. It is with the advent of Renaissance ideas that the L-plan comes to be known in the province: hall, or halls, in one wing, kitchen (with chambers above) in the other, the two wings being served by a single stairway. The desire for greater privacy, indeed the very concept of privacy, resulted in a proliferation of chambers even during the Middle Ages. These, and the desire of the seigneur and his family to withdraw somewhat from the more public places in their houses, resulted in the evolution of chambers in the gatehouses and the building (from the twelfth century onwards) of chamber blocks, or lodgings ranges.

With the Renaissance came also the epoch of the *Grande Renovation*, from the later fifteenth century to the second half of the seventeenth century. This was the age when ceilings were inserted, when the numbers of chambers increases, where more latrines are provided and a greater emphasis on privacy. Internal timber galleries, linking stairways to chambers and even crossing halls, were now redundant and gave way to the newly inserted ceilings, thus completing the evolution of galleries during the Middle Ages and allowing of circulation at that level, previously impossible. Partitions were inserted at the lower end of the hall creating a living space not visible from the main doorway; the great hall was evolving into the private dining room. In many houses it was possible for the first time to pass at first- (and second-) floor level along the length of the residence without having to descend one stairway and climb up again by another, or find one's way along an internal gallery.

This evolution of privacy was evident too in the arrival of the Renaissance *pavillon*, added to the existing house, and containing additional chambers, sometimes over a new kitchen. Domestic life was turning its back on the dust, noise and smell of the main courtyard, and towards the peace and quiet of the garden and orchard. The social and cultural consequences of this revolution in domestic provision cannot be underestimated; it was simply an immense change but one that occurred over some two hundred years and the pace of which varied greatly from one area to another, and the origins of which are evident in the Middle Ages. The lord, slowly and almost imperceptibly, was cutting himself off from the active management of his domain and distancing himself from his tenantry. Whereas in the Middle Ages the social classes were brought into close contact with each other, now in the Renaissance and early Modern period, with the greater emphasis on privacy, they began to grow apart. The social and cultural implications of this revolution in upper-class housing have yet to be fully appreciated and studied.

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#### NOTES

1. Meirion-Jones 1982.
2. Subsequently Professor of Medieval French History, University of Nottingham.
3. Subsequently Professor of Palaeoecology, Queen's University of Belfast.
4. Garrigou Grandchamp *et al.* 1997.
5. Meirion-Jones and Jones 1993; Meirion-Jones *et al.* 2002.
6. Dixon, 1976; 1993.
7. Impey, 1991; 1993; 1999; Impey and Harris 2002; Impey and McNeill 2013.
8. Lescroart and Faucon 1995; 1997.
9. Napoléone 1993; 1998.
10. Séraphin 1998; 1999.
11. Scellès *et al.* 1999.
12. Carré 1997; 1999.
13. Scheffer and Bouvet 2000.
14. Hoffsummer 2011.
15. Hunot 2001; see also Hoffsummer 2011.
16. See, for example, Saint-Jouan 1998.
17. For several recent studies see Hoffsummer 2011.
18. Baudry 2011.
19. Prigent and Tonnerre 1998, deal with a wide range of ecclesiastical and secular buildings (including mills and bridges), with some attention to dendrochronology, over a wide timescale; Mussat 1986; 1997.
20. Meirion-Jones (ed.) 2013.
21. Dixon 2013.
22. Meirion-Jones and Jones 2013.
23. Carré 2013; Litoux 2013; Carré and Litoux 2013; Hunot 2013.
24. Joineau 2013; Séraphin 2013.

25. Garrigou Grandchamp 2013.
26. Meirion-Jones 2013.
27. Bouvet 2013.
28. Scheffer and Bouvet 2000; Bouvet 2013.
29. Nicolas-Méry 2013.
30. Salamagne 2013; Litoux 2013.
31. Impey and McNeill 2013.
32. Gautier 2013.
33. Crépin-Leblond 2013.
34. Scheffer and Piron 2013.
35. Favre and Bouvet 2013.
36. Audebrand 2013.
37. Séraphin 2013.
38. Joineau 2013.
39. Meuret 1993; 1998.
40. Hunot 2013.
41. Nassiet 2013.
42. See Johnson 2002 and Coulson 2003, for recent insights.
43. Myers 1959, contains much information on the organization of a royal household in the fifteenth century. For a recent study of the Breton court, see Jones 2009.
44. Jones *et al.* 1989.
45. Meirion-Jones 1982.
46. Dixon 2013.
47. 1154 marks the end of the reign of Stephen (House of Normandy) and the arrival on the throne of England of Henry II (the first Plantagenet, 1154–69) and his wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine (d. 1204), divorced wife of Louis VII, king of France.
48. Robert Grosseteste, the great bishop of Lincoln, reprimanded, about 1250, William de Warenne, earl of Surrey, and his chaplain, for having allowed the mass to be celebrated in the great hall of his manor house in Grantham: Luard 1861, p. 172; Mantello and Goering 2010.
49. Impey and McNeill 2013.
50. Westminster Hall was built, 1097–99 for William II (Rufus), by far the largest hall in England—and probably Europe—at the time, 73m by 20m. It survives in the form of the rebuild of 1398–99, for Richard II, with its famous hammer-beam roof.
51. It was modified 1348–49; the present central doorway dates only from 1789.
52. Founded by Henry de Blois (bishop, 1129–37), the domestic buildings were mostly erected by Cardinal Beaufort in the 1440s.
53. One consequence of this is the relative poverty of archival evidence for most of the buildings we have studied before the end of the fourteenth century. Among the first significant survivals Joubert 1890, may be mentioned, but few significant series of seigneurial accounts relating to building work at any level in western France are known while, even for royal France, it would be impossible to replicate the approach of Brown *et al.* 1963, which drew so extensively on the rich financial evidence of medieval English Exchequer accounts.
54. Airs and Barnwell (eds) 2011.
55. Meuret 1993; 1998; 2013.
56. Brand'honneur 2001 is the best detailed discussion.
57. Irien 1981.

58. Mottes have been the subject of several inventories; see Brand'honneur 1990; Hinguant 1994; or Kernevez 1997.
59. See Irien 1981; Brand'honneur 1992; and Brunet 2004 for three important excavations.
60. Le Patourel 1981; Aberg 1978.
61. Chapels occur frequently at the entrance to a manorial enclosure, sometimes inside the moated area as at Le Bois Orcan (Noyal-sur-Vilaine, Ille-et-Vilaine) or Kerjean (Finistère), to cite only two of numerous examples; occasionally the site is outside the moat as at Landal (Ille-et-Vilaine). These occurrences are paralleled by the example of medieval towns where a church or chapel-of-ease is frequently found close to a town gate.
62. *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, book 2, chapter 13, 'adveniens unus passeium domum citissime pervolaverit, qui cum unum ostium ingrediens mox per aliud exiit'.
63. See Guigon 2001 and Jones 2001, for more detailed accounts of the terminology.
64. Tanguy 2010.
65. Guillotel *et al.* 1998–2004, for a facsimile text of the cartulary and commentary; Davies 1988, and Astill and Davies 1997, are the best secondary accounts of the abbey, its estates and dependents.
66. The most important excavation of a Carolingian aristocratic residence in Brittany is that at Locronan (Finistère) by Guigon 1992, where one building, externally measuring 12.5m by 9.5m, has been identified as a potential *aula* and an associated structure, 8.8m by 6.6m, as a *camera*.
67. Fichet de Clairfontaine *et al.* 1990.
68. Cf. Jones *et al.* 1989.
69. Blair 1993.
70. Meirion-Jones, Jones and Guibal 2008 for a full description of Coadélan.
71. Garrigou Grandchamp 2013.
72. Leloup 1996.
73. Meirion-Jones and Jones 2013.
74. Meirion-Jones and Jones 2003, reprinted 2006, citing testimony from Archives Départementales, Côtes-d'Armor, 1 E 1529.
75. Cf. Amiot 1992 and 1994.
76. Impey and Harris 2002.
77. Jones *et al.* 1989, 80; Meirion-Jones and Jones 1993, 180.
78. Impey 1993.
79. Blair 1993.
80. Jones *et al.* 1989, 90.
81. Meirion-Jones and Jones 1995.
82. Meirion-Jones and Jones 2002.
83. Dating by Dr Martin Bridge. The porter's lodge gives dates of 1382 and 1383 and the porch 1384. Construction during the last two decades of the fourteenth century is thus entirely reasonable.
84. Meirion-Jones and Jones 1991.
85. Scheffer and Piron 2013.
86. Cf. Meirion-Jones and Jones 2002.
87. Cf. Nassiet 1991.
88. Nassiet 1993.
89. Jones *et al.* 1989, p. 91.
90. Meirion-Jones 1982.
91. Meirion-Jones *et al.* 2008, 458 and 460 (plan) for the *étuve* at Coadélan.
92. For comparable English evidence see Thompson 1991; 1995.

93. Meirion-Jones and Jones 2013.
94. Meirion-Jones and Jones 2003, citing testimony from an enquiry, now Archives Départementales, Côtes-d'Armor, 1 E 1529.
95. Jones and Meirion-Jones 2001, 52, citing testimony from an enquiry, now Archives Départementales, Ille-et-Vilaine, 1 F 1225.
96. Galliou 2004, 31.
97. Meirion-Jones 1978–79.
98. See Meuret 2013.

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