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SIMON BAILEY

NOTES

- ¹ Warwickshire Museum cat. no. A37, NGR SP 283525.
- ² J. Burgess, *Proc. Soc. Antiq.*, 2.7 (1876), 258.
- ³ J. B. Ward-Perkins, *London Museum Medieval Catalogue* (London, 1940), 23, fig. 2, no. 1.
- ⁴ J. Cherry, 'A copper alloy staff head from Halifax Place, Nottingham', forthcoming.
- ⁵ Anon, 'Open-work bronze object', *The Searcher*, July 1993, 25.
- ⁶ M. Henig and K. Leahy, 'Two sceptre mounts based on the dodecahedron', *Antiq. J.*, 69 (1989), 321-23.
- ⁷ Warwickshire Museum cat. no. A7157, NGR SP 089549.
- ⁸ John Pickin pers. comm.
- ⁹ Barbara Clayton pers. comm.
- ¹⁰ Ward Perkins, op. cit. in note 3, 23, fig. 2, no. 2.
- ¹¹ A. Halpin, 'A "Winchester-style" bronze mount', *National Museum of Ireland*, 7-12.
- ¹² J. Cherry, 'Excavations at St. George's Street, Canterbury', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 105 (1988), 115-17.
- ¹³ H. D. W. Sitwell, 'Royal Sergeants-at-Arms and the Royal Maces', *Archaeologia*, 102 (1969), 203-50, pl. xvi.
- ¹⁴ Chris Gavett, Royal Armouries, Tower of London, pers. comm.
- ¹⁵ W. L. Hildburgh, 'English Alabaster Carvings as Records of the Medieval religious Drama', *Archaeologia*, 93 (1949), 51-102, pl. xvi.
- ¹⁶ H. Smith, 'Fifteenth-century Painted Panels from the Rood Screen of Nayland Church, Suffolk', *Antiq. J.*, 3 (1923), 345-46.

THE ORIGIN OF THE WORD 'KEEP' (Pl. xiv, c)

When we use the word 'keep' we have at the back of our minds the feeling that it derives from the verb and implies tenacity, holding-out, the ultimate defence in a castle. This no doubt influenced the editors of the *Oxford English Dictionary* who, quoting their two earliest references of 1586 and 1598, suggested that it derived from an English translation of the Italian word *tenazza*.¹ This might suggest some sort of derivation connected with Renaissance artillery fortification. The purpose of this note is to show that this suggestion is very wide of the mark and that the word evidently derives from a very improbable Middle English noun.

One of us had drawn attention to an earlier occurrence of this word in 1567, applied to the circular keep at Cornet Castle, Guernsey,² and invited information on earlier occurrences. This led to a lively exchange of letters and postcards between the authors, each one pushing the date further back. In fact it emerged that the late David Cathcart King had already found the reference of 1523,³ as will emerge. The simplest way of dealing with this will be to set out the references chronologically rather as students of place-names do, but before doing so a short account of Guines Castle, seven miles S. of Calais, must be given.

At Guines a motte, 60 m in diameter across the top, bearing an 18th-century clock tower, is all that survives,⁴ but the castle's history goes back to the 10th century when it was founded by the first count of Guines, and towards the end of the 12th century Baudouin II, count of Ardres, erected a 'donjon cylindrique en pierre de taille'. In 1352 it was taken by the English and held until 1558 when it was 'demantelé'. Fortunately, several plans and views were made in the last years of English occupation, kept in the British Library, and they have been published.⁵ The castle is shown fortified with three trilobate bulwarks and the keep is shown unmistakably on its motte. It appears to have had a flat roof over the interior with a wooden turret on it, but the roof is suspiciously flat like the interiors of the bastions as if it had been filled in to create a gun platform. There seem to be gabions around the top, rather than merlons, of the type used by gunners for protection. The keep, which is quite tall, has three

marked bands of masonry around it so that the resemblance to weaving on a basket is obvious, and the Middle English word which is applied, 'kipe' and variations (cognate with coop), needs no explanation. If the French had applied 'La Cuve' to it⁶ to mean a tub, it would be even more appropriate since the dark bands would recall the iron hoops on such a vessel. The French 'u' is notoriously difficult for the English ear, so the English could be a familiar cockney-style mispronunciation.

The references discovered so far can be set out chronologically:

- 1375-76 Guines: a tower called 'le kype' was heightened.⁷
 1402 £666 13s. 4d. paid to rebuild the donjon called 'la Cupe'. "'kype" or "cupe" is the same as modern coop, and then meant a basket of a particular type which the shape of the donjon presumably resembled in the eyes of the English soldiery'.⁸
 1409-12 the great tower called 'le cupe'.⁹
 1523 the keep compared unfavourably with the 'dungeon' at Wark.¹⁰
 c. 1535-40 Launceston, Rockingham, Northampton, Devizes, Warwick, Pickering, and Brecon. Seven mentions in Leland's *Itinerary* found by King, and apparently all with the exception of Northampton shell keeps, or at any rate keeps on mottes and perhaps significant for this reason.¹¹
 1547-48 Guines: 'kepe' mentioned in an inventory of ordnance and munitions.¹²
 1567 Castle Cornet, Guernsey: mentioned in a survey of the castle.¹³

What conclusions can be drawn from this? First, the word was used from the 14th century to describe the shell or perhaps the tower with striking banded decoration on the motte of the castle of Guines after the English had occupied it in 1352. In 1523 the term keep was deliberately contrasted with donjon as used at Wark. A few years later Leland used the term for shell keeps in different parts of England. It is possible that the word had been used colloquially for some time, but was not thought to be suitable for the written word. It gradually took over as the term for all keeps as donjon became the romantic dungeon.

The difficult jump is from Guines to general use. The most likely explanation is surely false etymology: the common-sense origin of the word seemed, as it seemed to the editors of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, to be that it derived from the verb (keep or hold), and the association with the Middle English word for basket was forgotten, particularly as Guines was lost to England in 1558 and the keep that had earned the nickname was demolished. It is an amusing story, but we hope that it is a reasonably accurate account of how this uniquely English word came into being.

JOHN R. KENYON and MICHAEL THOMPSON

NOTES

- ¹ *Oxford English Dictionary* 1933; also in 2nd ed. vol. 8, 375b (Oxford, 1989).
² M. Thompson, 'The visit of the Society for Medieval Archaeology to the Channel Isles', *Fortress*, 18 (1993), 62.
³ D. J. C. King, *The castle in England and Wales: an interpretative history* (London, 1988), 188-96 (hardback edition); 190-98 (1991 paperback edition).
⁴ C.-L. Salch, *Dictionnaire des châteaux et des fortifications du moyen âge en France* (Strasbourg, 1979); L. R. Shelby, *John Rogers, Tudor military engineer* (Oxford, 1967), ch. 2.
⁵ Shelby, as in note 4, pls 1-5; H. M. Colvin (ed.), *The history of the king's works*, vol. 3 (London, 1975), pls 36-37.
⁶ Shelby, as in note 4, p. 7, note 2.
⁷ Colvin, as in note 5, vol. 1 (London, 1963), 452.
⁸ *Ibid.*, 452.
⁹ *Ibid.*, 452.
¹⁰ *Archaeologia Aeliana* new ser. 14 (1891), 345.
¹¹ King, as in note 3, gives references in Leland, but for Northampton see vol. 1, p. 7. The castle at the latter was virtually destroyed by the railway, but it was a motte and bailey and Leland probably meant the bailey.
¹² J. R. Kenyon, 'Ordnance and the king's fortifications in 1547-48', *Archaeologia*, 107 (1982), 190 (f.314r).
¹³ Thompson, *op. cit.* in note 2.