

WINCHESTER CONFERENCE

21 - 23 July 2000

Friday morning visit to the Hospital of St Cross

The Hospital was founded between 1133–1136 by Bishop Henry de Blois, grandson of William the Conqueror. The foundation was intended to provide a residence for 13 poor, feeble men and supply them with food and clothing. It has a group of medieval buildings which are still in use, and is one of Britain's oldest charitable institutions. In 1446 Cardinal Henry Beaufort proposed to add additional almshouses for impoverished servants of the state, of noble birth. The Wars of the Roses delayed this plan for forty years but then the 'Order of Noble Poverty' was established. The foundation survived the Dissolution and there are now 25 brothers. The de Blois Brothers wear black gowns, while the Beaufort brothers can be distinguished by their red gowns.

Entering the outer quadrangle the 14th century bakehouse is on the left, on the site of the former Hundred Men's Hall. Under the terms of the de Blois foundation 100 poor men could come daily for their dinner, and were allowed to take away anything they could not eat at the time. The entrance to the inner quadrangle is via the Beaufort Tower c 1450, a stair within the tower leads to the Master's lodgings on the upper floor. On the east side of the quadrangle, extending from the Beaufort Tower to the church, are the cloisters which have a timbered first floor gallery. East of the cloister the gardens extend to the River Itchen.

The fine transitional Norman church, built between 1135 and 1295, is on the south side of the quadrangle; a clerestory was added and the original thatch replaced by a lead roof in 1334-1335. In the chancel and south chapel there are examples of ornate wood carving believed to have come from Wolvesey Palace. On the west side of the quadrangle are the almshouses, built in 1485, that form the brothers' lodgings. There are four lodgings off each staircase, sharing one of the high octagonal chimney stacks which forms such a prominent feature.

The Brethren's Hall, c.1340, lies to the north of the quadrangle. The fine timber roof which contains a high proportion of Spanish chestnut was put in circa 1497; the wooden staircase leads to the Master's rooms over the Beaufort Tower. There are three early vernacular chairs in the hall, one having a high spindle back, and a table with a heavy circular marble top, possibly 12th century, which may have come from Winchester Castle. For many years the brothers ate in this hall and the kitchen lays on the north side, the two being connected by a short passage. The kitchen contains a number of interesting features from previous centuries including a meat store and a beer cellar.

Our thanks to our guides who gave us such an informative tour.

Pat Passmore

Friday afternoon Winchester Walk

Friday afternoon was spent on a walk around the centre of Winchester led by Professor Tom Beaumont-James and Mandy Richardson. On the north side of the Cathedral were the sites of the old & new Minsters, and of St. Swithun's original tomb. Walking through The Close we looked at the exteriors of the Prior's Hall, the Judge's Hall and the Pilgrim's Hall (this having a superb hammer beam roof of circa 1290 -1320), and Cheyney Court. Through the city's King Gate in the east wall, one of the two original city gates, we turned towards Winchester College, founded by William of Wykeham and built outside the city on land left derelict after the Black Death. Past the college is the entrance to the old Bishop's Palace and the remains of Wolvesey Castle, one of Winchester's two Norman Castles. Then we followed the River Itchen and saw a fragment of the Roman city wall before joining the High Street near King Alfred's Statue.

We visited the chapel of St. John's Hospital, a local charity since 1289 and probably before. In the charity's boardroom were seven oak chairs, (circa 1587) that derived from Peter Symond's Charity. Passing through the Cathedral gardens we visited the City Museum where an exhibit of particular interest was a painted hall chair. Proceeding east through The Square we were shown the sites of the Old Palace and the Cornmarket before going up the High Street to the Pentices. Here there were a number of medieval shop fronts with medieval houses built behind, one of which is an early Wealden house. We saw the 43-foot Buttercross, the Godbegot house, a fine example of a courtyard house built after the Black Death but before 1500; the Staplemarket and the Plague Monument erected to mark the transfer of the town market to the outside of the city walls because of the 1666 plague.

This brought us to Westgate, another early city gate with a small museum on the first floor, then the ruins of Winchester Castle, and finally to the castle's Great Hall with the legendary Round Table. We left via the garden to see the Charles II's unfinished palace which he started in 1683.

I hope this report illustrates the depth of knowledge of our guides and their enthusiasm in sharing Winchester's wealth of history with us.

Pat Passmore

Dr Tom Beaumont James, Friday evening lecture on 'An introduction to the History of Winchester'

We were fortunate to have with us for most of the weekend Dr Tom Beaumont James, reader in History and Archaeology at King Alfred's college. He is the author of 'Winchester' an English Heritage production, described as the best single volume on the city. Dr James' lecture on the first evening was a prelude to his guided tour of the city scheduled for the following day.

The city's long history was told through a series of mainly architectural images. He began by explaining

how archaeology has revealed the Iron Age settlements of Oram's Arbour and St Catherine's Hill to the north and south of the city. When the Romans settled Winchester they occupied the high ground reusing the Iron Age banks and ditches. Later they extended the city boundaries by canalising the river to the east and draining the flood plain.

Dr James explained how much of the the Roman street plan could still be seen, most notably in the High Street where the medieval 'Pentice' occupies the site of the Roman forum. As the Roman occupation came to an end in the fourth century little replaced it until the seventh century when the first Christian buildings were built. The old minster, completed in 660, proclaimed Winchester as an important religious centre.

The history of the city can be seen through the influential people who lived there. King Alfred is a figure much associated with Winchester although little is known of his time in the city. After his death in 899, his son Edward the Elder instructed that the New Minster be constructed alongside the Old and his parents' bodies interred by the high altar. When work began on the cathedral in 1079, the Old and New Minsters were demolished and much of the stone reused in the cathedral and surrounding buildings.

Another figure of great significance was Henry de Blois, who not only founded the Hospital of St Cross but also constructed the east hall at Wolvesey Palace c.1130. The palace has been described as one of the greatest Romanesque houses in Britain.

The 'Round Table' in the Great Hall of the castle (built in the 12th and 13th century) has been dendrochronologically dated to 1290. It probably was constructed as a table but painted at a later date, perhaps to impress Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor who visited Henry VIII at Winchester in 1522.

During the medieval period the city walls were rebuilt, incorporating the West Gate and the King's Gate. In the High Street stands the 14th century Buttercross and, close by, a Wealden house, dendro-dated to 1340. This evident building boom was curtailed by a massive decline in population caused by the Black Death between 1348 and 1350. The population of Winchester fell from an estimated 13,000 in 1300 to about 5,500 and did not recover to its previous level until the 19th century. Despite losing royal patronage and religious prominence, enduring death and disease, the city remained an important centre. In 1682, Charles II began to build a palace to be the 'English Versailles' in Winchester, but it was never completed. There were few grand buildings constructed after this date although some civic buildings were erected. This included the old Guildhall built in 1714, and the new Guildhall, constructed in 1873 in the Gothic style which now dominates the Broadway.

With such a long and distinguished history it is difficult to give a brief overview but Dr James ably prepared us for our tour of the city the next day, with glimpses of the treasures that awaited us.

Alison Lee

Saturday lectures: Dr John Crook FSA 'Woodwork in the Cathedral and Close at Winchester' and a visit to the Cathedral.

Dr John Crook's morning lecture introduced us to Winchester Cathedral's long history which encompassed many of the defining moments of British history. Within such a context, we were made aware of the numerous alterations and additions to this Romanesque structure which we would be able to observe later on in the day. In the afternoon, we assembled outside the west front which overlooks the site of the Old Minster marked out in brick on the green. We split into groups and were shown round by cathedral guides.

Once inside we walked down the nave with its elegant, soaring columns and beautiful vaulting that had been remodelled in the Perpendicular style by William of Wykeham and his architect William Wynford towards the end of the 14th century. The choir stalls at the end of the nave are early 14th century, although the front of the screen was rebuilt in 1638 by Inigo Jones and again in 1874 to a design by Sir George Scott. The impressive medieval stalls are thought to be the work of William Lyngwode, a Norfolk carpenter. Letters exist, excusing Lyngwode from court work presumably to work on the stalls and we were reminded once more of Winchester's wealth of documentary evidence. The stalls are a riotous display of foliage, wild animals and hundreds of tiny faces. The misericords are of humorous secular subjects.

The choir leads through to the stone arches of the Presbytery on top of which are six painted mortuary chests containing the bones of the long dead Saxon kings and bishops. The chests were successively reconstructed over the years. Four of the surviving chests date from around 1520, the other two are later replicas. The high altar has an interesting foliate altar rail and at the far end of the presbytery is the great stone screen carved in the late 15th century. The original statues were removed and largely destroyed during the Reformation and the replacements are Victorian. Some fragments of the original statues are displayed in the triforium gallery housed above the north transept in the Romanesque heart of the cathedral. Here it is possible to experience the quiet dignity of Norman architecture.

Furniture in the cathedral included a fine 14th century armoire (fig. 3), two clamped chests, two heavy benches, one of them curved, some library stickback chairs, a velvet-covered X-frame chair said to have been used by Mary Tudor during her marriage to Philip of Spain and a fitted cupboard declared in true RFS style to be 15th, 17th, or possibly 19th century.

We saw many other treasures including the 12th century illuminated Winchester Bible, but it was a bench-end in the lady chapel, of a choirboy removing his cassock that stole everyone's heart (fig. 4).

Lynne Bebb

Karen Parker Furniture from Southampton and Winchester Inventories, 1540 -1575'

Karen Parker's splendid account of the chests and coffers listed in Southampton and Winchester probate inventories between 1540 and 1575 was read by Victor Chinnery. Karen, a member of the Winchester Museum Service, is engaged on a detailed study of the inventories, and for her lecture she selected these two items which in their own way reflect the differences between the two towns at that time; the inventory appraisers often included valuable information on the construction, materials and uses to which these containers would have been put.



Fig 3. A 14th century armoire with its strap hinges

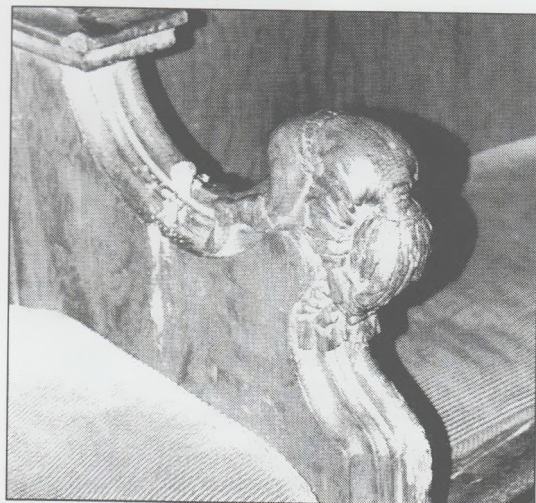


Fig 4. Choir boy removing his cassock

While both inventory collections include those of tradesmen and widows, there are many merchants represented in the Southampton lists compared to just one in Winchester where, as might be expected, many of those listed were ecclesiastics. The inventory appraisers distinguished the two types of containers – the coffers with their domed lids and bases flat on the floor, the chests on legs and with flat lids. Winchester had more coffers than chests, while Southampton had more chests than coffers, but the totals put together were broadly similar – a little over 800. Only four give details of their construction such as ‘joined coffer of oak’ or ‘joined chest with spring lock’. Two Southampton chests were divided into compartments and several are mentioned with shelves, drawers or removable boxes. Only one coffer and one chest had their dimensions recorded.

The location of each item within a house was listed, as was the appraised price. Some highly valued articles had been owned by wealthy men of substance, but most were made by local joiners such as Christopher Nutley in Southampton. Oak as a material of construction was presumably too common to mention, but chests of fir owned by wealthy men occur in both sets. Chests of walnut, chestnut and beech are listed in Southampton, a ‘nut coffer’ being mentioned in Winchester. Decoration in the form of carving, paint, textiles, leather, iron strips or plate is sometimes specified, as is colour – for example red or green either painted or covered in velvet. A black chest might be leather or Naples fustian. One ‘beset by bone’ was very highly priced. Iron bands, locks and keys were provided for security and chests made completely of iron were the most expensive. Spruce chests, imported from Prussia, were for the transport of linen, while imported cypress chests and coffers were highly valued for being mothproof; 48 appearing in the Southampton lists. Two plated chests appear in Southampton but none in Winchester.

The lecture concluded with references to more specialised containers: ‘ship’ chests and coffers, those of barber-surgeons with their instruments, sugar chests and a counting chest. It was noted that Southampton, being a sea-port involved in luxury trade with Venice, had the wider variety of imported chests from Brittany, Rouen, Denmark, Spain, Venice and Flanders.

Joyce Sleight

John Steane FSA, ‘The Archaeology of Bureaucracy in the Middle Ages’

The talk by John Steane intrigued us by its title. Its substance proved to be the importance of documents in the Middle Ages and the various means used to preserve them. He began by pointing out that the Medieval political and social system depended on a series of rights and agreements through which power and control was exercised. The earliest agreements, written on wax, were superseded by parchment rolls formed of a number of skins sewn together. In spite of certain disadvantages, particularly in the indexing and retrieval of infor-

mation, this remained the normal method of storing information throughout the Middle Ages; the Domesday Book being an exception.

The preservation of these rolls against the risks of fire, theft and damp was achieved in the first place by keeping them in specially built muniment rooms. We were shown a number of slides of such rooms still existing in various institutions. Notably they had tiled floors, stone walls and usually stone vaults. In addition they were built on an upper floor in a separate tower with small windows, access being up narrow stone stairs.

The rolls themselves were generally kept in chests and John Steane showed us many examples still in situ in muniment rooms. Such chests were usually iron bound and furnished with a number of locks. A further development came with the provision of separate boxes on racks, an arrangement which must have greatly facilitated the tracing of individual documents. Although crude in appearance the boxes were soundly constructed, the sides nailed to the fronts so that they would not be detached when withdrawn from the racks. We saw a number of examples of these racks, described in an early inventory as ‘a nest of tills’.

An exceptional chest has holes bored into the front and back into which fitted a series of rods. From these rods the rolls were suspended in linen bags. Although no longer kept in the chest some of the rolls are still in their original bags. As a means of preserving parchment or paper from damp this seems very effective.

The survival of this country’s rich archives is something for which we as historians must be grateful to our ancestors. We are grateful to John Steane for showing us in detail how this was achieved. His talk more than compensated for the fact that we were unfortunately unable to see the Winchester college muniment rooms. In recent years the study of furniture history has rightly widened to consider more than just the ‘minutiae of style and construction’ (Charles H. Laycock’s words). We have been shown how much in our own studies can be learnt from the scholarship of other disciplines. We shall all look again at medieval chests with new eyes.

Gabriel Olive

Dr Michael May, 'Inventories and Interiors – Documentary Evidence for the Changing Use of Domestic Space in Winchester Houses c1650–1710, with particular reference to No. 11, The Close.'

Dr. May explained that with the Winchester Project the inventories were used to try and explain house use and room function, the locations of the rooms and how the space was used. From the period 1650–1710 there were 294 inventories and these were broken into 20 year spans. From the 294 inventories, 473 spaces were analysed; 69 halls; 72 parlours; 112 kitchens; 69 butteries; 34 garrets; 29 parlour chambers. Functions such as sleeping, sitting, dining, cooking and also heating could be inferred from the presence of furniture and hearth fittings. Dr. May explained that he was looking, not only for continuity and change in room use but was always asking the question 'Why?' Fundamental was the notion that the use of space is produced by and in turn produces and reproduces social relations. He provided the following percentage variations between the two 20-year spans 1650–69 and 1690–1710 as examples: Halls – 65% but down to 30%; the use of cooking in hall declining but the use of dining/sitting rising, with hearths becoming rarer as time went on. Hall chambers – 33% to 55%, showing the enclosure of roof space in halls with the introduction of ceilings; kitchens – already 70% but rising to 90%; the functions dominated by cooking but with tables, benches, chairs and stools also listed. Kitchen chambers – 25% but up to 55%, showing that kitchens were increasingly integrated into the structure of houses. Butteries were becoming increasingly rare – 54% down to 40%. Parlours – 45% up to 60%; second parlours were rare – 6% to 10%. These parlours were used primarily as sitting spaces – 55% up to 90%, but with dining use declining, 62% to 42%. Beds in parlours were rare – 30% to below 20%.

Dr May went on to note that it was not only the frequency of references to these spaces which indicated the ways in which they were acquiring or losing importance but also the process whereby particular items were increasingly meaningful to consumers and those who saw them deployed within domestic settings. He gave as an example; window curtains – 15% up to 37%; 58 of the 101 references found in chambers; only 3 in kitchens; 1 in a hall; 12 examples in parlours; 5 in dining rooms (spaces found only in high status inventories). He took these curtains to be indicators of private space use in parlours, chambers and, interestingly, mostly used in parlours which were not furnished with beds (either sleeping or display), indicating that these were private sitting spaces. Dr. May finished his talk on the Winchester inventories by saying how the material culture listed serves to show the growing importance of parlours and chambers. This corroborates the other inventory evidence and helps to suggest what was the real significance of house form and room utilisation during this period. The second part of Dr May's talk dealt with No 11 The Close, a house we were to visit the

next day. The house was built in the early 1660s, with its basement storey housing the domestic offices in line with the very latest ideas in English domestic architecture and use of space. The first occupant in 1664 was Dr Walter Darnell who died in 1684 and whose inventory could be used in conjunction with the Wainscot Book recording the costs incurred by tenants improving the clergy houses, which lists the panelling and so helps identify individual rooms. Dr May showed us a plan of the house and described the type of furniture listed in the inventory.

Robert Williams

Saturday evening furniture surgery

The furniture surgery was prefaced by two brief but interesting talks. Elizabeth Viney was able to add a fascinating postscript to our visit to Winchester Cathedral. She explained that it was her father, Henry James Viney, who had restored some of the early pieces of furniture and woodwork that we had been examining earlier in the day. She handed round several large photographs which dated from the immediate post-war years. They showed work in progress and some of the furniture in the 'before' and 'after' state.

Rupert Brown then gave us a designer and craftsman's view of some pieces that we would be seeing on Sunday afternoon at Winchester College. He told us in particular how the original commission for a simple pair of wooden candlesticks to go either side of the altar in the chapel turned into a tour-de-force consisting of a

spectacular pair of Gothic-inspired candelabra constructed in various materials, allowing Rupert to show his virtuosity in many different media.

For the furniture surgery Bill Cotton was invited to take the floor to lead the discussion on the many items that had been brought along. The following examples, from a very full evening will perhaps give some idea of the proceedings.



Fig. 5 Yorkshire Windsor chair

A hoop-back Windsor armchair (fig. 5) retaining remnants of its original green paint and later black over-painting proved on closer inspection to be from a Yorkshire workshop rather than part of the Gillow tradition of Windsor chair-making. Turnery features such as the high collar on the front legs and the use of imported American birch for the seat are indicative of this particular Yorkshire tradition although High Wycombe makers also used imported American birch

in the second half of the 19th century. The use of sprigs or nails securing the spindles to the ash hoop and the tell-tale concave markings of a 'roughing plane' used to thickness the underside of the seat were added points of interest.

A Dales-type chair also served to confirm that first impressions can deceive. The distinguishing characteristic in this instance is the rush protection strip on the front edge of the seat: this is concave on its inner face, so that it fits snugly onto the rush and is one of the unusual features found on chairs made in the Whitby region.

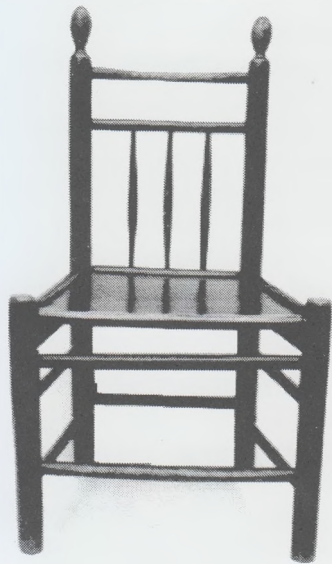


Fig. 6 A West Country spindle back chair

Yet another example of construction details indicating an unexpected origin was illustrated by a spindle back chair (fig. 6) made in the West Country rather than the West Midlands. These chairs have the front edge of their wooden seats set into a turned front rail rather than nailed onto a frieze in the Clisset manner.

Due to shortage of time other items, such as chests and coffer had to be passed over, although despite the late hour small groups

gathered round some of the pieces for further informal discussion.

Keith and Gill Pinn

Sunday visit to Winchester College

My maternal grandmother's maiden name was Winchester and I inherited her heavy brass paperknife topped with the Winchester College 'Trusty Servant'. The latter's porcine story was probably the only part of the College history we did not hear on our frenetic tour of its venerable buildings.

We gathered at the porter's lodge, watched over by a benevolent blue-eyed stone head with leafy hair on one side of the ribs of the vaulting. The College buildings cluster around the south side of the city wall, carefully sited by William of Wykeham in 1387. Welcomed by our guide Mr G Henderson, we entered Chamber court where 70 poor scholars and 10 commoners (the latter paid fees) first gathered as new boys in 1394. Now there are 673 boys (70 still have scholarships) and two girls.

The warden's lodge was an oak panelled, heated first floor chamber, where a club fender displayed some alternative 'poker' work (roast chestnuts?). Sir Walter Raleigh's judges stayed here, though they would not have seen one of only 20 known late 17th century

stained glass sundials with its realistic fly.

Across the courtyard, the Seventh Chamber contained fitted open-top cubicles into which the tonsured scholarship boys could formerly lock themselves to avoid being disturbed. Also known as Toys, (the youngsters were allowed to bring one toy each) it was used as the main classroom until 1687, but is not a playroom. No masters are allowed in and we were the first tour group ever to be admitted.

At the chapel we were greeted by the college chaplain, The Revd. Robert Ferguson. In a masterly summary of its long history, he reminded us that the building contains some of the finest perpendicular fan vaulting in England. In the choir a collection of lively late 14th century oak misericords awaited our inspection, though the screen had been removed at the Reformation. In the sanctuary we admired the Rupert Brown candlesticks which contrasted with the 1680-83 altar rails. A framed panel of faded 1636 stumpwork embroidery and the brass memorials caught our collective eye.

A highlight was our visit to the Moberly Library, housed in the stone-built former brewery building, 1387-1404. Converted by Sir Herbert Baker in 1932-4, it is now one of 20 libraries in the College. It has a mainly crown-posted roof with an intriguing side-purlined and windbraced eastern end, presumably purpose-built for the huge boiling vat that formerly stood there. A large louvre was indicated above. An enthusiastic Dr Geoffrey Day, Head of English and the Moberly Librarian, explained that the boys (as was common in all English public schools until the beginning of the 20th century) drank small beer, as the water in this malarial city ditch area was not safe. We admired many new fittings by Rupert Brown – benches, library shelves, panelling and a Latin chronogram, the latter a tortuous test for new boys today. The intermittent gilded Roman numerals dictate the year (1994) of the new work, the benefactor being Viscount Eccles.

We liked Eric Gill's newel post finial – a rebus showing the owl of learning perched on a beer tankard. On the first floor were Sir Herbert Baker tables and chairs; a clock by his son showed all the time zones of the world. The Eccles Room on the ground floor contained chairs, a long reading table and library bookcases by Rupert Brown. His piece de resistance was a standing lectern with drawers, cupboards and 'trick' draw shelves. A Donald Potter wood sculpture caused interest, both above and below the waist. Wrongly ascribed to Eric Gill, the nude St Sebastian was definitely not St Joan...

Mr Henderson moved us on to the Hall, where pupils apparently dine in some discomfort, either on modern plastic chairs or heavy 16th century fixed benches alongside fixed 4-inch thick oak trestle tables. A voyder stood near the service end into which the prefects formerly put the left-overs for which they were paid by weight: the food then went out to the poor. We went out for tea, to be sated not only with new scones, thick cream and jam, but a wealth of Winchester wonders that will long stay with us.

Janet Pennington