The Old Bishop's Palace, Worcester: some observations on its medieval fabric

by

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INTRODUCTION

The former see palace of the bishops of Worcester, high on the banks of the River Severn and north of the cathedral, was visited by some AMS members in advance of the Society's AGM on 7th July, 2011 at Hartlebury Castle (Fig. 1). At Worcester members were privileged to experience a memorable tour led by Frank Bentley, who conducted us to many undercrofts and other spaces not accessible to the general public. As Hartlebury, written up in Volume 56 of our *Transactions*,[1] is the other significant surviving palace of the bishops of Worcester, it was felt appropriate to include an article on the little known 'Old Palace' at Worcester in a subsequent volume.

Fig. 1
Worcester Old Palace, the east facade as rebuilt for Bishop Hough, 1723.
Photograph, R. K. Morris

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The palace ceased to be an episcopal residence when it was converted into The Deanery in 1842. Nowadays it is the Diocesan Office, since 2008 also accommodating the Bishop of Worcester's Office and, as the Church House for the diocese, provides meeting, function and restaurant facilities. The principal rooms are usually open to the public and available for reception hire. The most significant previous published accounts of the palace's fabric are Sir Harold Brakspear's brief description in the *Victoria Counties History* volume (1924), Frank Bentley's own excellent recent guidebook which was available to members on their visit, and the survey of 2009-2010 by Professor John Hunter and Christopher Guy.[2] It is not our purpose to repeat their information more than is necessary to provide context, but rather to offer some new ideas and to refine the dating and interpretation of the medieval fabric.

For consistency of reference, we have retained the current scheme for identifying floors and rooms in use at the palace; thus 'RA1' is basement room 1, 'RB1' is ground floor room 1, 'RC1' is principal floor room 1, etc.[3] Selecting appropriate names for the plans is complicated by varying floor levels within the building, which can seem bewildering to the visitor. This results partly from the site sloping down towards the river, but mainly from the historical development of the medieval palace and subsequent sub-division. Essentially the southern half of the palace (to your left as you stand in the forecourt) incorporates the surviving fabric of the 'Norman' 11th/12th-century chamber blocks, which were lower in height than those added, mainly to the north, in the 13th century. Thus the southern part of the palace particularly includes what is now a sort of mezzanine floor – the former upper floor of the Norman palace – which we have termed 'ground floor'. We hope this becomes apparent as you study Jill Atherton's floor plans, sections and reconstructions which have been commissioned especially for this article. With regard to nomenclature, we have proposed revised names for some of the main interior spaces. Thus, the 'bishop's hall' or 'great hall' becomes the 'great chamber'; also the great undercroft beneath it, traditionally and misleadingly called 'The Abbot's Kitchen' – it was never a kitchen and Worcester never had an abbot[4] – becomes the 'chamber undercroft'.

The section on the 'Buildings Archaeology' which follows is primarily the work of Tim Tatton-Brown, and that on the 'Mouldings' primarily of Richard Morris, but all three of the named authors have contributed ideas and observations to the whole article.

THE MEDIEVAL PALACE: THE BUILDINGS ARCHAEOLOGY

The Romanesque Bishop's House

One hundred and fifty years ago, Professor Robert Willis wrote his fine 'Architectural History of the Cathedral Monastery of Worcester', which discusses in detail the Norman rebuilding of the cathedral church and its associated monastic buildings, and sets the scene historically.[5] Willis also reviewed the surviving documentary evidence for the work of the last Anglo-Saxon bishop, Wulfstan (1062-95), at the cathedral and priory,[6] but unfortunately did not look at the remains of the bishop's residence just to the north-west of the cathedral (Fig. 2). A few years later, when Willis looked at the buildings of Canterbury Cathedral Priory,[7] he briefly described the medieval archbishop's palace,

but did not discuss the surviving early remains of Archbishop Lanfranc's houses in the walled precinct (of about five acres) north-west of the cathedral. However, it is certain that both the episcopal residences were cut out of the north-west corner of the late Anglo-Saxon monastic precinct, and encompassed within a separate precinct with boundary wall, probably in the late 1070s; several large fragments of this wall still survive.[8] At Worcester there appear to be no above-ground remains of such a wall, but it seems likely that the separate precinct (of nearly two acres) was first created for the bishop around 1090 when the English monastic cathedrals – like Winchester, Norwich, Rochester and Durham – were all dividing up their estates between the bishop and the priory, following Lanfranc's lead.[9]

The first person to analyse the fabric of the Worcester palace and drew a phased plan was Harold Brakspear. His text is brief but he recognised that there were 'walls of older work', i.e. dating before the time of Bishop Giffard (1268-1302).[10] Our recent study of the surviving fabric confirms this assessment, and recognises that there are fragments of at least two separate rectangular blocks within the remains of the later vaulted undercrofts, both in the southern half of the existing building. First, the most easily recognisable (but far from complete) is an east-west building above undercroft RA13 in the south-eastern part of the present structure (Figs 3, 4B). The most visible evidence for it is in the eastern part of the exterior south wall of the palace, where a round-arched window and part of another round-arched aperture, probably a door (both blocked) are set in a wall of red sandstone ashlar blocks (much repaired).[11] The arches of both features are in green Highley sandstone, which was also used in parts of Wulfstan's cathedral church (1084-*c.* 1100), the chapter house and in 12th-century works in the nave.[12] The external dimensions of this east-west building may have been about 50 feet long by 25 feet wide (15m x 7.5m), but early walls survive to any height only on the west and north-west (Fig. 4A). On the south and east, one can suggest that there was an undercroft, into which two bays of 13th-century vaulting were later inserted. This room has internal dimensions of approximately 32 feet by 15 feet (9.8m x 5.6m),[13] but only its south wall seems to be beneath an early (i.e. Norman) chamber at ground floor level; on the north, the wall above is set a few feet further north (cf Figs 4A, 4B). On the west, the undercroft has a later tunnel vault leading westwards for about 12 feet (3.75m), before it passes through the main early wall on the west (Fig. 6).

All the early work here is distinguished by the use of coursed rubble masonry with wide mortar joints. This can be compared with the early Norman work at the cathedral, and one may suggest that perhaps this block was first constructed in the late 11th century for Wulfstan. At the external north-west and south-west corners of the west wall, partly covered by 13th-century masonry, are traces of what could be pilaster buttresses, whilst in the centre of this wall, at the end of the later tunnel vault, a round-headed doorway seems to have been inserted into the masonry in the 12th century. This early west wall is still at least 25 feet high (7.5m) and is visible above in the room now used as a library (RB13, Fig. 4A), but unfortunately all the masonry here is covered in a heavy render or limewash. Round the north-west corner to the north side of the upper section of the wall, much fine early Norman masonry can be seen on the south side of an internal court.[14] Here the coursed early masonry with thick mortar joints is very apparent, and

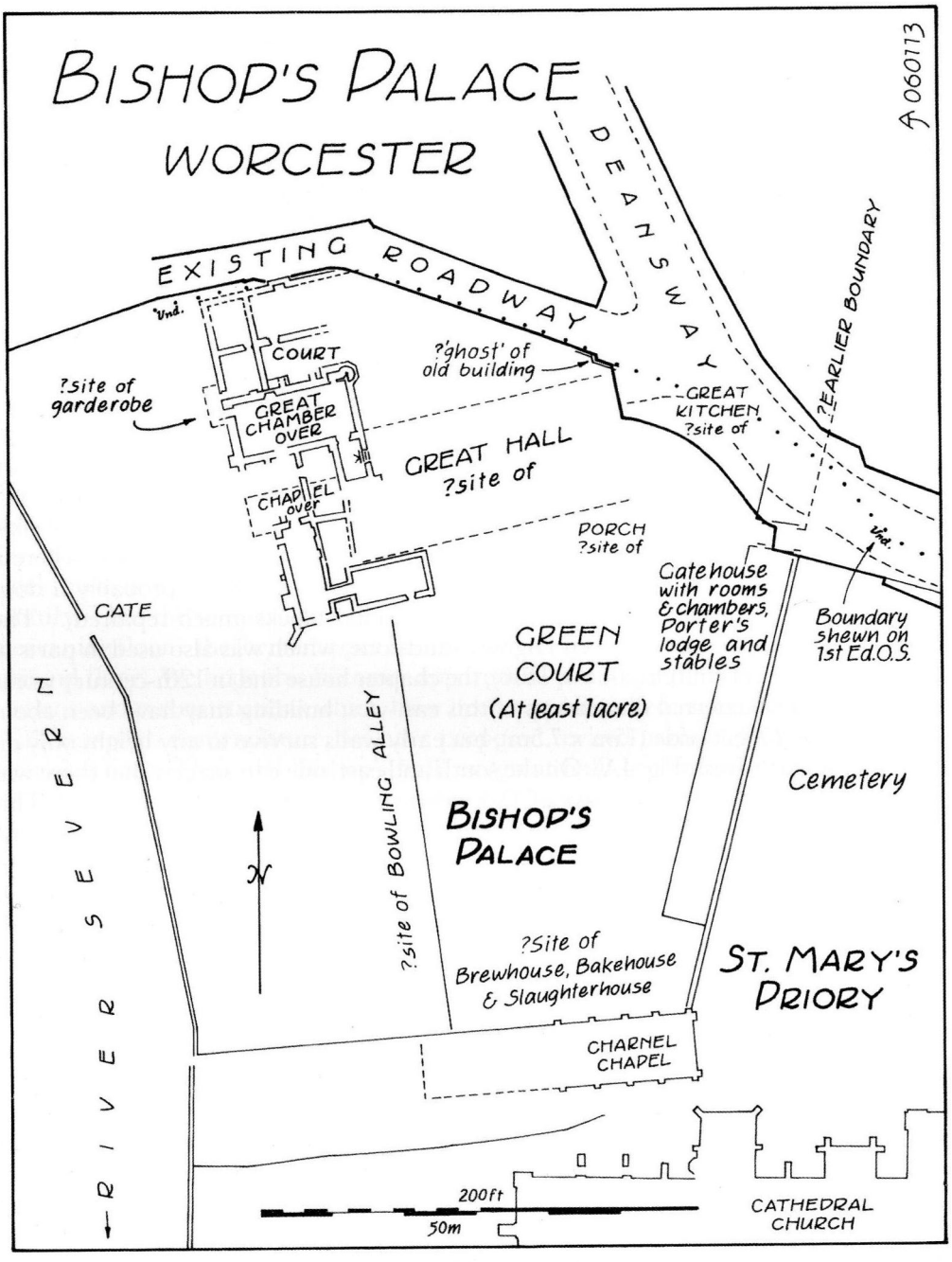


Fig. 2

The medieval palace, undercroft plan as it might have appeared in the later middle ages, with the proposed site of a ground-floor great hall to the east; the cathedral church is at bottom right. At top right 'Deansway' (1935) cuts across the former eastern boundary of the palace precinct.

Drawing, J. Atherton

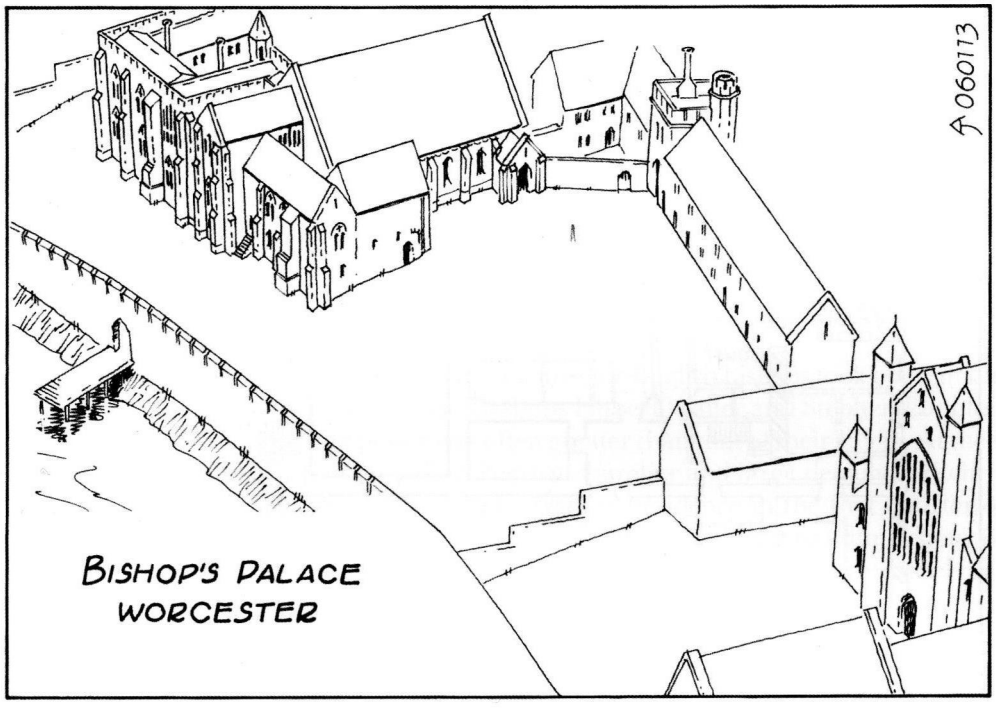


Fig. 3
The medieval palace looking north, showing its main features as they might have appeared in the later middle ages. An impression of an eastern great hall is given at top centre; the west front of cathedral is at lower right.
Drawing, J. Atherton

remarkably one can see a round-headed doorway (with an arch of green Highley stone, like those in the south wall) which has been inserted into the wall at its west end (Fig. 7). The doorway has finer mortar joints and it may have been added in the early to mid-12th century, to allow entry into the upper floor of the building – possibly to access the Norman bishop's chapel.[15]

The second Norman building appears to be a north-south building, traces of which can be detected in the cellars (RA6/7) lying immediately beneath the existing chapel, now much used for storage. This cellar space has internal dimensions of about 30 feet by 14 feet (9.25 x 4.25m), and Brakspear confidently marked its east and west walls as 'older work' (i.e. Norman) on his plan.[16] In fact, the west wall in its present form seems to be contemporary with the 13th-century door and window in it.[17] The lowest parts of the east wall in RA7, on the other hand, do appear to relate to an earlier structure, of unknown date but pre-dating the construction of the great chamber undercroft (RA1) and its lower vestibule (RA4).[18] However, the most telling evidence for a Norman structure in this part of the palace would seem to be its south wall (the south wall of RA6), which is out of alignment with the 13th-century works but more or less parallel

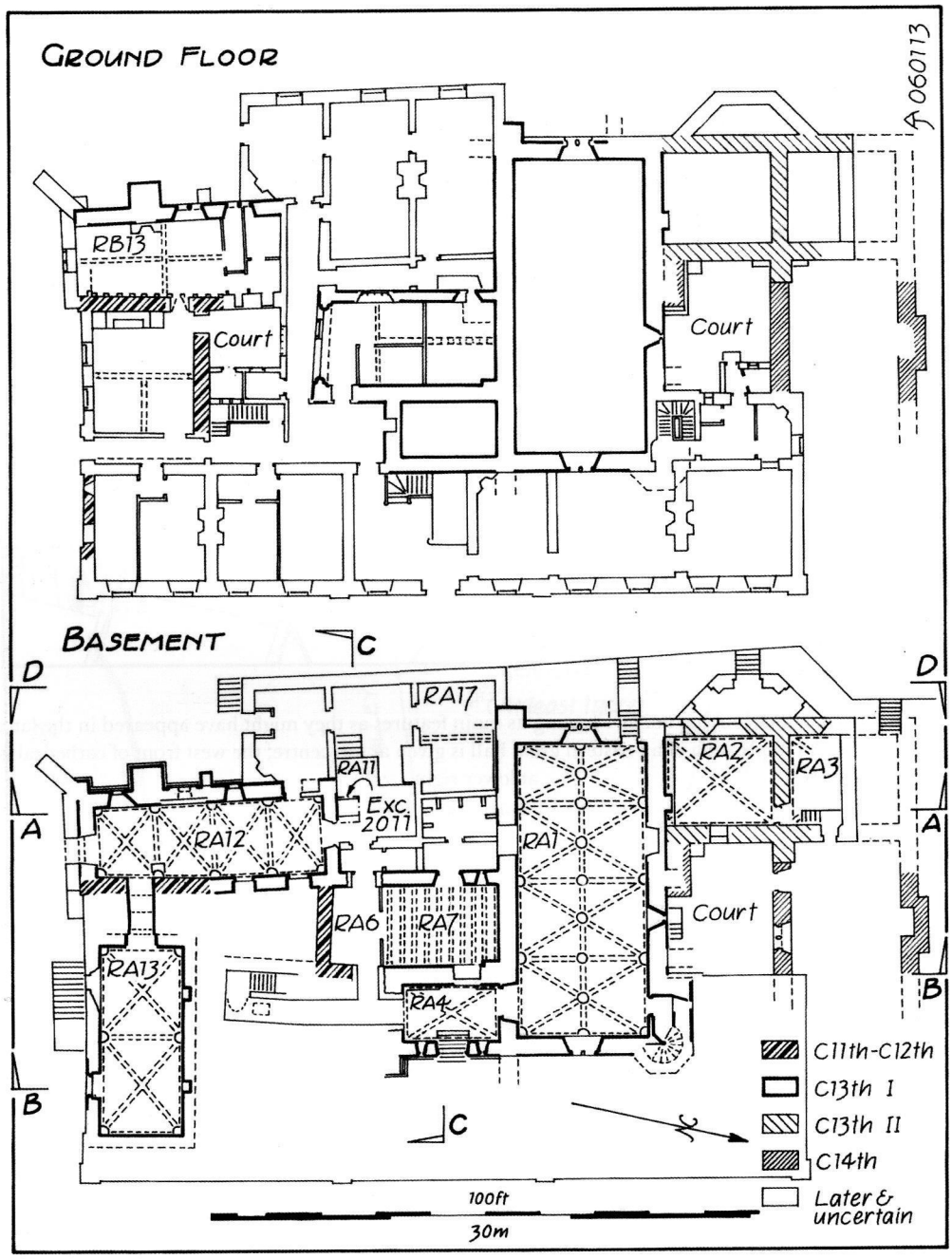


Fig. 4

Plans of the palace as existing, showing the main medieval periods of construction: A (top). Ground floor, with the 'solar' at top left (RB13); B (bottom). Basement, with the vaulted undercroft of the great chamber right of centre (RA1).

Drawings, J. Atherton

with the Norman east-west chamber over RA13 (Fig. 4A, B).[19] It seems possible that this north-south building was also erected in the 11th century, for Wulfstan or his successor, Bishop Sampson (1096-1115).

West of this range and swallowed up within Bishop Stillingfleet's western block of *c.*1691-3, there may have been another early Norman structure. The only tentative evidence at present for this suggestion is an offset at the very bottom of the south wall of the great chamber undercroft, near its south-west corner, and visible in cellar room RA17.[20] These masonry fragments were perhaps associated with other timber buildings on the site. Certainly, from the 12th century at least, one would expect there to have been an aisled, ground-floor great hall of timber, as still partly survives at Hereford.[21]

The 13th-Century Palatial Residence

Major advances in the building of palatial residences for English bishops took place in the 13th century.[22] The lead was taken by archbishops Hubert Walter and Stephen Langton of Canterbury, whose status and power was often greater than that of their rulers. At their Canterbury palace an aisled great hall with great chamber and large detached kitchen was added to the existing late 11th- and 12th-century residence in the first quarter of the 13th century.[23] The enormous great hall of eight bays had internal dimensions of 168 feet by 64 feet (51.25 x 19.5m), exceeded in size only by the king's Westminster Hall. Attached to the upper end of the Canterbury hall was a large great chamber on a vaulted undercroft, six bays long and 76 feet by 21 feet (23 x 6.5m) internally.

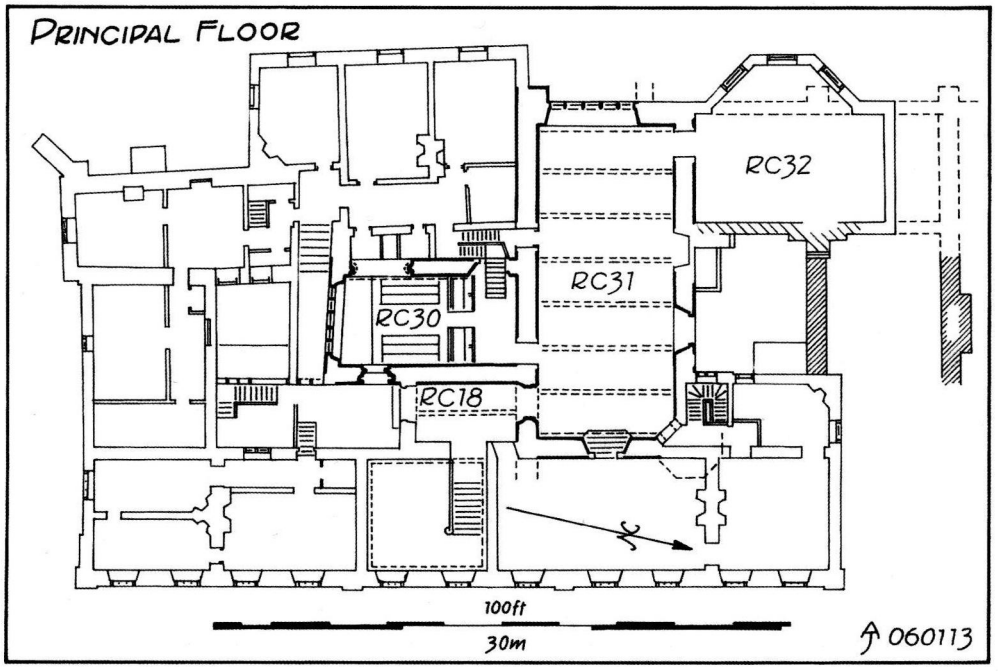
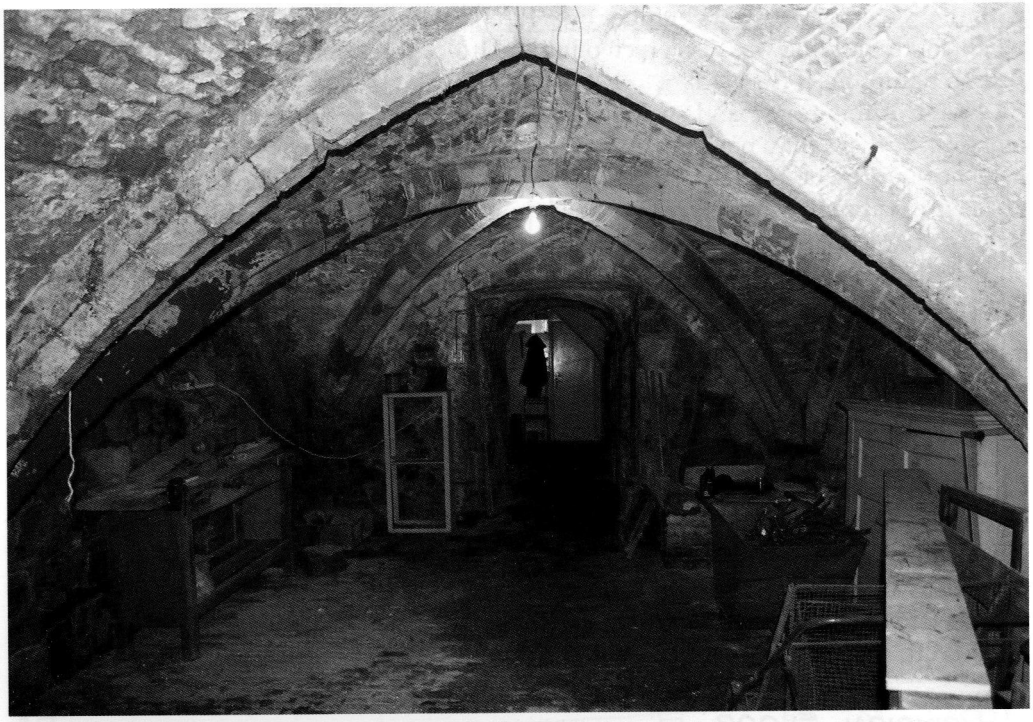


Fig. 5
Plan of the principal floor of the palace as existing: the great chamber is right of centre (RC31); the chapel (arranged north/south) is at the centre (RC30), with the entrance vestibule to the great chamber to its east (RC18).
Drawing, J. Atherton



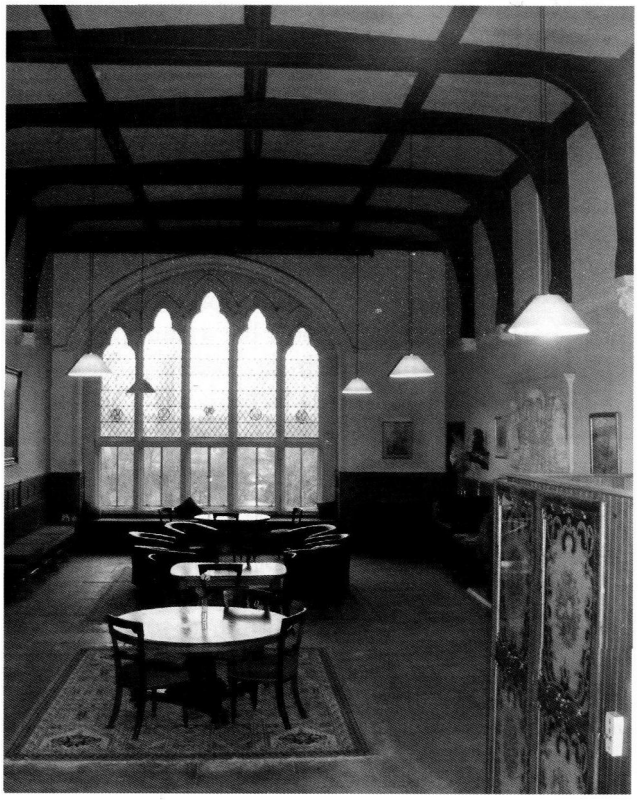


Fig. 6 (left page, top)
Undercroft RA13, looking west through the 'tunnel' through original Norman west wall to undercroft RA12. The rib-vaults here are 13th century.
Photograph, A. Harris

Fig. 7 (left page, bottom)
Internal courtyard, with surviving Norman doorway.
Photograph, A. Harris

Fig. 8 (above)
Undercroft under the great chamber, looking west.
Photograph, A. Harris

Fig. 9 (left)
Great chamber, interior looking west.
Photograph, A. Harris

During the course of the 13th century many of the English bishops followed suit, commissioning new aisled halls, great kitchens and chamber blocks at their residences besides their cathedrals.[24] Unfortunately, almost all these great buildings were stripped of their lead roofs and wrecked on the orders of parliament when the bishoprics were abolished during the Commonwealth; though probably not at Worcester (see further below).[25] So in recent decades most of these destroyed buildings have had to be 'rediscovered' by architectural historians and archaeologists, as has happened at Canterbury, Lincoln, Durham, Chichester, Hereford, Exeter, Wells, Lichfield and, above all, at Wolvesey Palace, Winchester, excavated by Professor Martin Biddle.[26] More work now needs to be done at palace sites such as Norwich, York, Ely and Salisbury.

At Worcester, we still have an impressive series of vaulted undercrofts of the later 13th century (see the next section for dating). The finest of these is the great vaulted chamber (RA1, Fig. 8), on top of which is the largest surviving room in the palace (RC31), which Brakspear identified as the 'Bishop's Hall' (Figs 5, 9). We would suggest that this 'hall' was actually the bishop's great chamber because, following the precedent of all the contemporary episcopal palaces cited above, there must surely have been a much larger, ground-floor aisled hall elsewhere on the site: indeed, Brakspear recognised this.[27] Thus it is proposed here that some sort of balcony-like structure (on the site of the upper vestibule, RC18) outside the great chamber's south-east doorway led to steps down into the high end of a great hall, east of the main residential block (Fig. 10). Locating a great hall here coordinates better with the residential block of the palace than Brakspear's suggestion that it lay to the south.[28] The undercroft (RA1) beneath the great chamber has a vaulted vestibule (RA4) beneath the 'balcony' (Figs 11B, 12A). This would have been within the north aisle of the hall, with its floor level only slightly lower than that of the hall (Fig. 10); it is estimated that the medieval ground level of the court to the east of the residential block was about 1.4m (4ft 6in.) below the modern car-park there.[29]

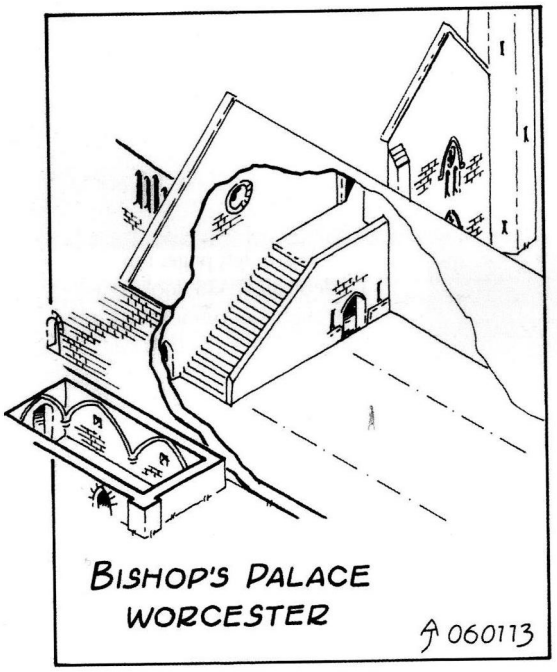


Fig. 10
An impression of how a ground-floor aisled hall might relate to the main residential block. The round window is shown, with steps leading up to the great chamber, and the entrance to the lower vestibule (RA4) below. The east wall of the great chamber is top right and undercroft RA13 at bottom left. Above the latter is the Norman door leading to the interior courtyard, and the 5-light south window of the chapel is also shown.
Drawing, J. Atherton

We suggest that at some time in the later middle ages, this hall was abandoned, probably in derelict condition, and demolished. This could

explain why the upper vestibule (RC18) now has a late medieval, low-cambered roof, because it was converted into a two-storey porch at this time, incorporating the vaulted vestibule below (Fig. 12A, left).[30] This could also explain why, following his installation as bishop, John Alcock (1476-86) held a great banquet in the 'Fraytor' (presumably the monastic refectory),[31] the episcopal great hall apparently being unavailable. By this time, the bishops may well have been satisfied with more up-to-date, aisle-less great halls at their other palaces, such as Hartlebury.[32]

The bishop's chapel (RC30) must have been situated directly to the west of the great hall, and can be identified by the piscina and a five-light window preserved in the south wall of this room (Figs 5, 13).[33] The chapel was truncated and re-arranged liturgically by Bishop Sandys (1559-70), to run north-south and entered by a new door on the north, from the former great chamber. However, hidden in the west wall of the present chapel is the original chancel arch, showing that the nave of the chapel extended further west (Fig. 11A). Also, high up in the east wall of the chapel is a 13th-century round, quatrefoil window, now blocked and visible only from the roof outside (Fig. 11B). It is evident on close inspection from the roof that we are seeing the inside face of this window, because the mouldings of its interior rere-arch are visible, as Jill Atherton first observed (Fig. 14). Thus the likelihood is that this window was originally in the west gable of the great hall, rather than lighting the upper part of the chapel. If we are right, this feature is the only firm piece of evidence in the standing fabric for the existence of a large great hall east of, and linked to, the residential block. Thus, if the west wall of the hall were to be reconstructed as one and the same as the east wall of the chapel, and if the hall were to be widened to the north to about 59 feet (18m), to absorb the vestibule/balcony (RA4/RC18) of the great chamber, then the round window would be about central in the west gable wall of the great hall (Fig. 10). Another corollary of this hypothesis, regarding the chronology of the palace's Gothic architecture, would be that the construction of this 13th-century great hall almost certainly preceded that of the chapel, which was subsequently built up against the west gable wall, hence blocking the round window.

Extending north from the north-west corner of the great chamber, almost as far as the boundary wall, was another 13th-century block, partly on the site of room RC32 and over the two-bay vaulted undercroft (RA2/3; Figs 2, 3).[34] It was evidently secondary to the build of the great chamber block, butted up against it, because one of the latter's external buttresses in its north wall (somewhat modified) is still visible in undercroft RA2 (Fig. 4B). The principal chamber apparently had a garderobe on the west side.[35] The bishop's palace at Salisbury provides a good parallel for this L-shaped arrangement.[36] The block probably contained the inner rooms of the privy part of the bishop of Worcester's palace, and this always seems to have been a favoured spot in the palace, with privacy and views over the River Severn.[37] Later in the middle ages another range was added which ran east from the northern end of this block (Fig. 4B). A doorway and a two-light window still survive at low level in the south wall of this addition, which butts against the wall of the earlier block, whilst on the north side a fireplace is visible in a fragment of wall now incorporated into the modern boundary wall. The details of the window are probably later 14th century (see further the next section). The identification of this range as the 'Tudor kitchen' is not accepted here.[38]

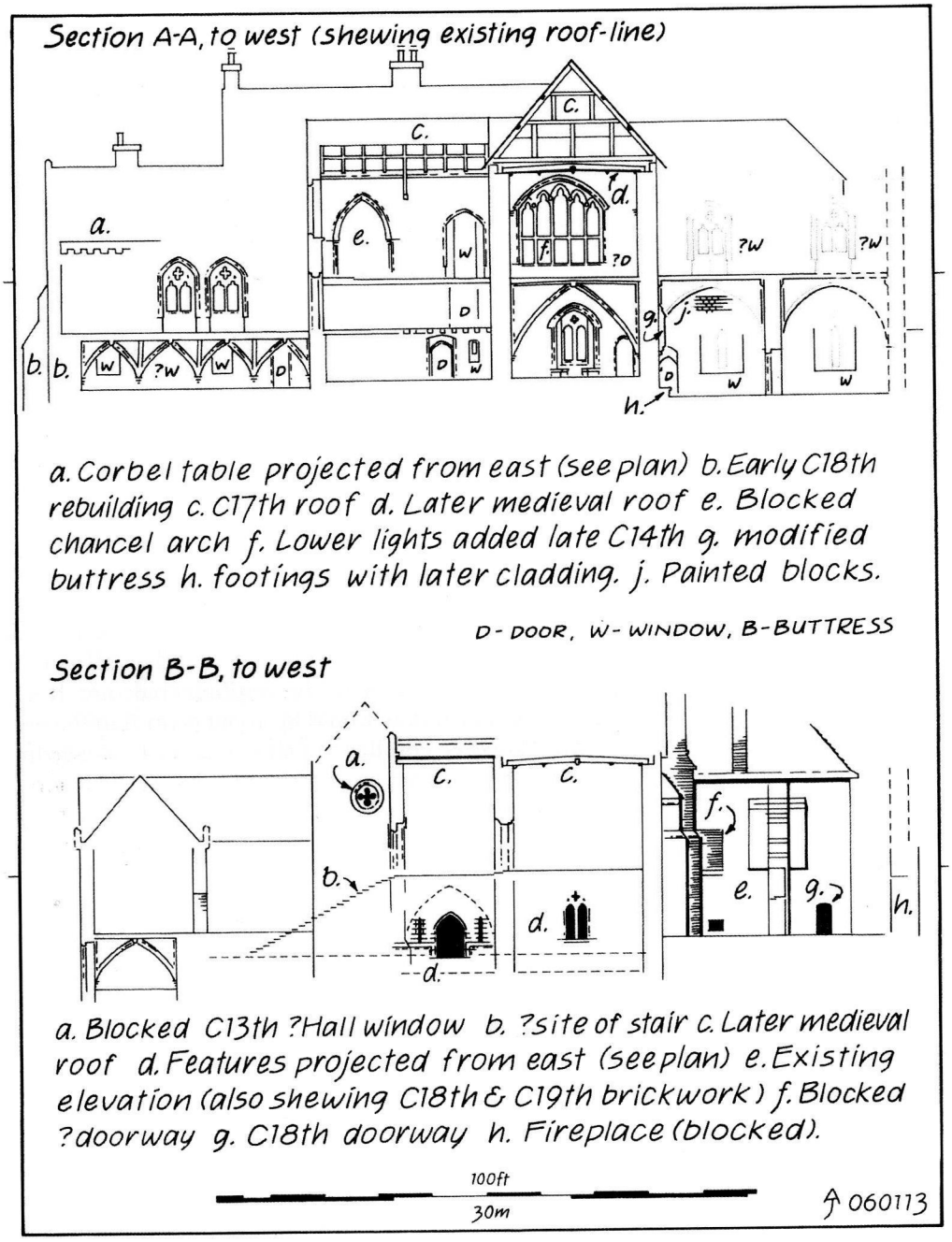


Fig. 11

A (top). South/north section AA, looking west; the great chamber (RC31) with its five-light west window and existing high-gabled roof is right of centre, the chapel to its left. B (bottom). South/north section BB, looking west; the lobby (RC18) is in the centre on the principal floor level, with the east facade of the lower vestibule below.

Drawings, J. Atherton, after drawings by S. Vacher (1880)

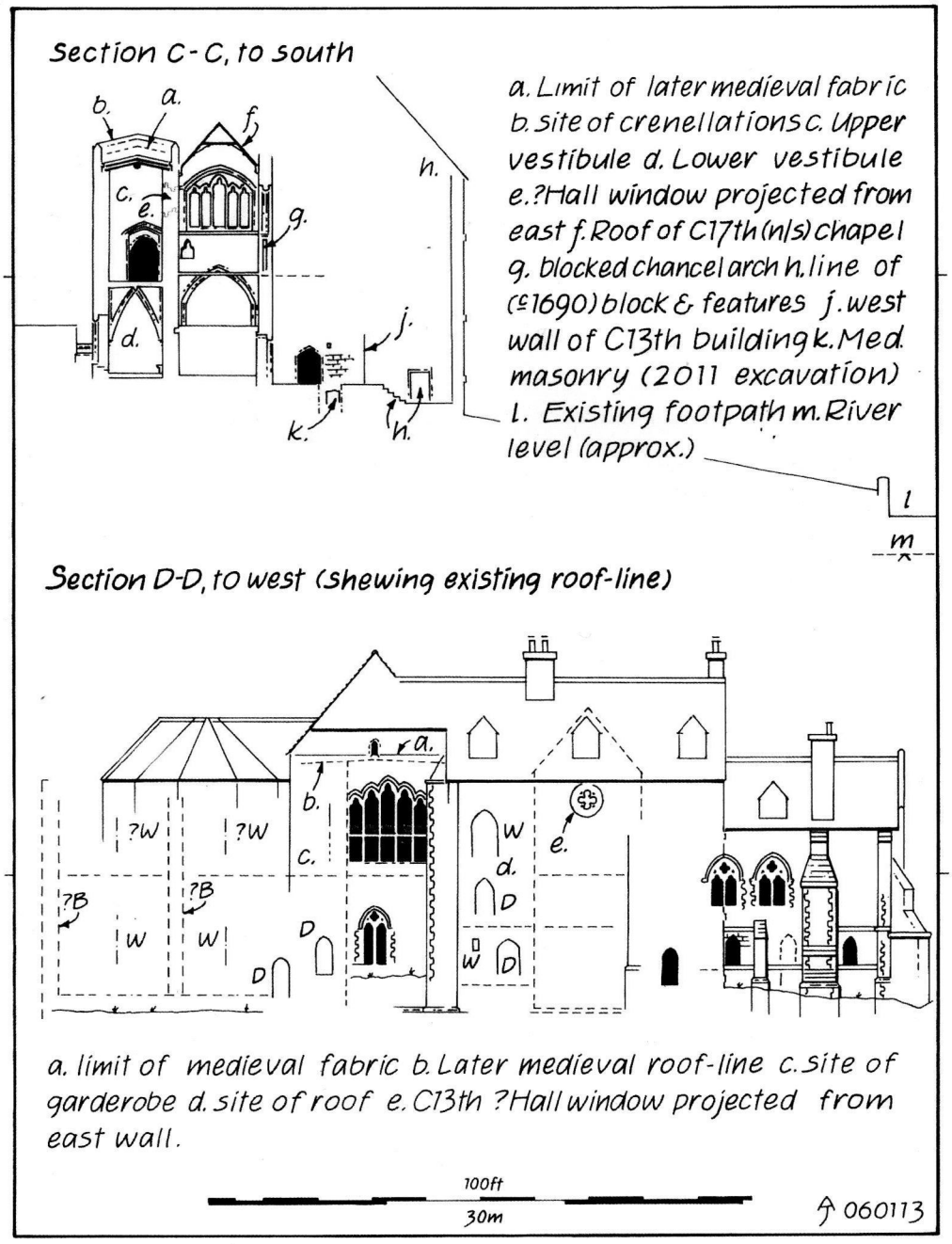


Fig. 12

A (top). East/west section CC, looking south; the chapel is under the gabled roof, with the great chamber vestibule (RC18) to its left. B (bottom). West elevation at DD, seen from the west; the great chamber is left of centre, and the 'solar' with a pair of traceried windows is at far right.

Drawings, J. Atherton, after drawings by S. Vacher (1880)

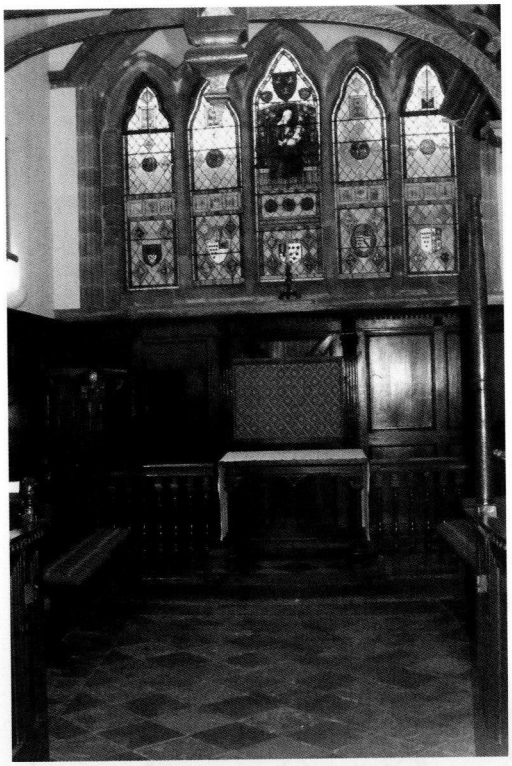


Fig. 13
Chapel interior, looking south from the entrance vestibule, as refitted by Bishop Skinner (1663-70); the medieval piscina is behind the panelling to the bottom left of the 5-light 13th-century window.
Photograph, A. Harris

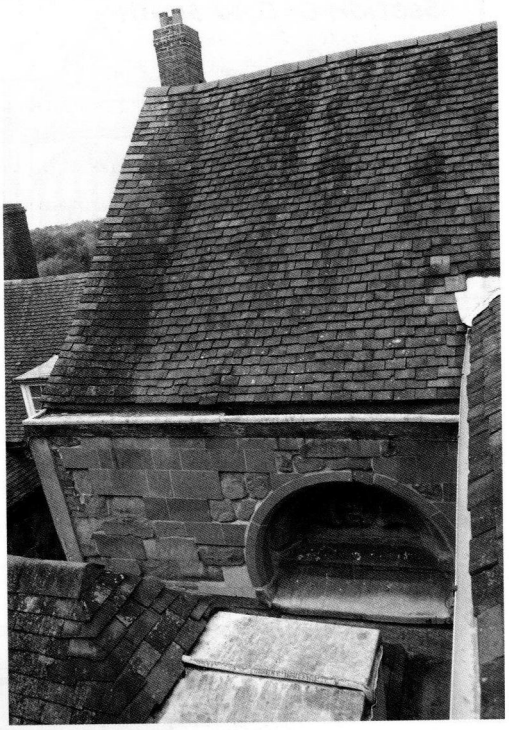


Fig. 14
Round quatrefoil window incorporated into the east wall of the chapel, seen from the roofs.
Photograph, A. Harris

Running south at a slight angle from the presumed nave of the bishop's chapel is another later 13th-century block, now the library (RB13) and a kitchenette, over a four-bay vaulted undercroft (RA12; Figs 2A-B, 15). At its southern end it is butted up against the east-west Norman building described in the previous section (over the undercroft RA13), and they may well have been interconnected by a door. It is characterised by a fine pair of windows, with two-light bar-tracery, looking out across the River Severn (Fig. 12B, right).[39] The chamber seems to have been fitted with a garderobe. The guidebook calls it a 'solar',[40] and in a general sense it is, presumably part of the privy palace, but its specific original use is unknown: it may have been best guest accommodation.[41]

Turning now to the topography of the site, the principal medieval buildings were situated in the northern half of the palace precinct (Figs 2, 3). As suggested above, the most likely location of the great hall would have been running east from the main building, and one day a modern geophysical survey may reveal its foundations in the front car park area. This position would fit well with having a principal outer court on

the south, a large open space of at least one acre, with the stables and related services to the east. The great gatehouse giving access to this court would open onto the street, known as Palace Yard in the 19th century, and Bishop Street and Lich Street before this (Figs 2, 3). The parliamentary survey of *c.* 1649 lists 'A Stronge Gatehouse with diverse Chambers Roomes and buildings belonging and adioyning to the Same'.[42] Not far to the west of the gatehouse would probably have been the porch opening into the lower end of the great hall, as at Canterbury and elsewhere, with the great kitchen and other service buildings to the north of this. One would hope that at some future time archaeological investigations will resolve this speculation.

MEDIEVAL ARCHITECTURAL DETAILS AND THEIR MOULDINGS

Despite the impression of an 18th-century palace which Bishop Hough's facade presents to the modern visitor (Fig. 1), the Old Palace preserves some excellent features of medieval masonry, predominantly from the 13th century. The main survivals of any earlier fabric have been discussed above,[43] and are not reconsidered in this section, which must be regarded only as a preliminary assessment of a selection of features which are easily accessible. The conclusion to be drawn from the analysis which follows is that the main core of the medieval palace seems to have been almost entirely rebuilt within a short period in the third quarter of the 13th century.

The most evocative of the medieval spaces today is the great chamber undercroft (RA1), a lofty space rib-vaulted in four bays, with fine stiff-leaf vault bosses and moulded

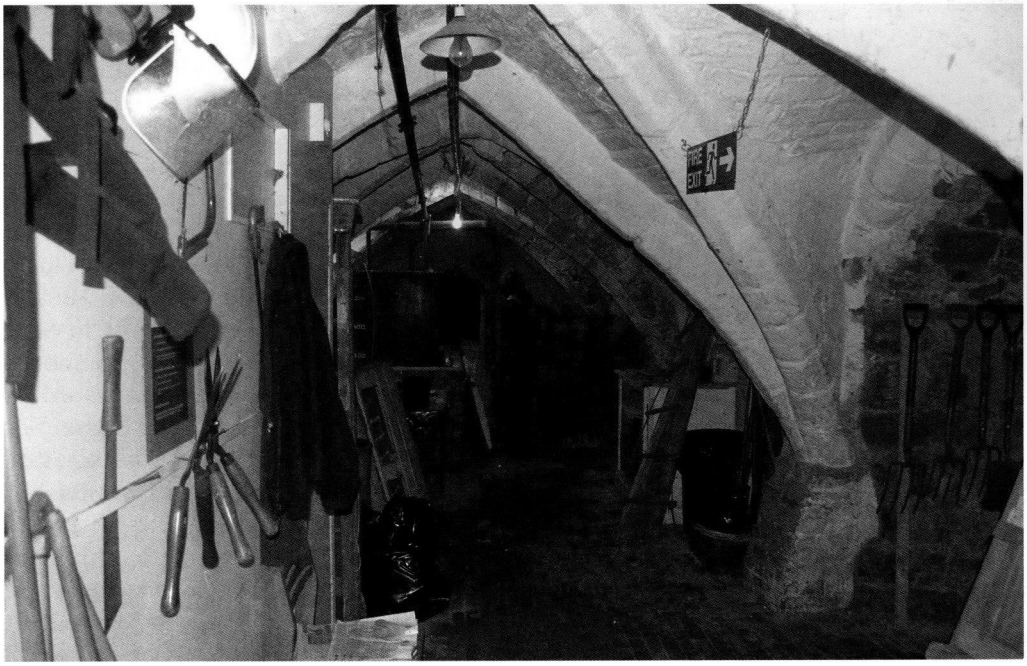


Fig. 15
Undercroft RA12, looking north; the passage just visible on the right leads through the former west wall to undercroft RA13.
Photograph, A. Harris

window apertures (Fig. 8). The excellent conservation and refurbishment of this room in 2008 has enabled its quality to be appreciated fully.[44] This clearly was a room of some distinction, presumably residential – perhaps for members of the bishop's household – rather than for storage. Cumulatively its architectural details make up the best preserved group in the building, and thus our diagnosis will commence with them.

The vault ribs spring from pear-shaped moulded corbels, all of a kind common in undercrofts for much of the 13th century, for example the recently excavated undercrofts of Coventry Cathedral Priory spanning *c.*1225-75, where corbels with mouldings closest

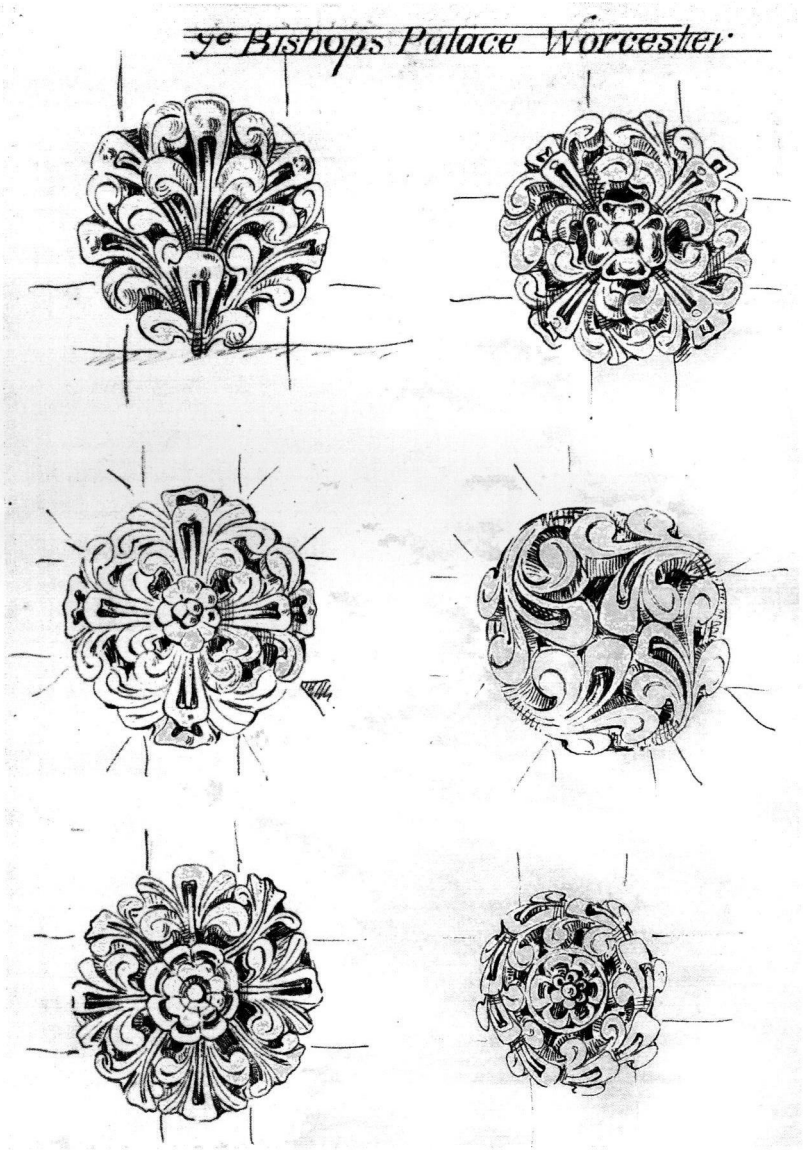


Fig. 16
Great chamber undercroft, six of the vault bosses.
Drawing by Sydney Vacher (1880).

to those at Worcester are dated approximately to the third quarter of the century.[45] The style of the carved bosses and the profile of the ridge-rib at the apex of the vault are rather more helpful for dating, though the best evidence derives from the mouldings of the window apertures (see further below). The carving of the lush 'stiff-leaf' (such an antiquarian misnomer) bosses follows in the spirit of the fine bosses in the Gothic east end of the cathedral (1224-*c.*1255) but lacks their exquisite quality (Fig. 16). At least four of the bosses each have a small flower at the centre, a detail which Dr Ute Engel has noted as distinguishing some of the bosses in the choir of the new east end, the last work to be executed from the 1240s to 1250s.[46]

The vault of the chamber undercroft is also characterised by a ridge-rib running along its length, with a more distinctive profile than the plain chamfer mouldings of the diagonal and transverse ribs: a polygonal axial moulding (sometimes endearingly termed a 'chamfered mitre') flanked by hollows and fillets (Fig. 17B).[47] The only real parallels for this rib, a rare design in the 13th century, have emerged from the excavations at Coventry Cathedral Priory, where rib-stones from the nave south aisle have the same profile and others from what may have been the prior's chapel are close. Unfortunately the aisle ribs have no corroborative dating evidence and could be from any time between the late 12th century and the mid-13th, but the other set of ribs is fairly certainly *c.*1250-75 and includes a style of stiff-leaf carving on one of the bosses that bears comparison with the chamber undercroft bosses at the Old Palace.[48] Elsewhere in the same period, the polygonal axial moulding appears in the new east arm of Tintern Abbey (Monm., 1269-88), for the high vault ribs and the soffit of the main arcade arches.

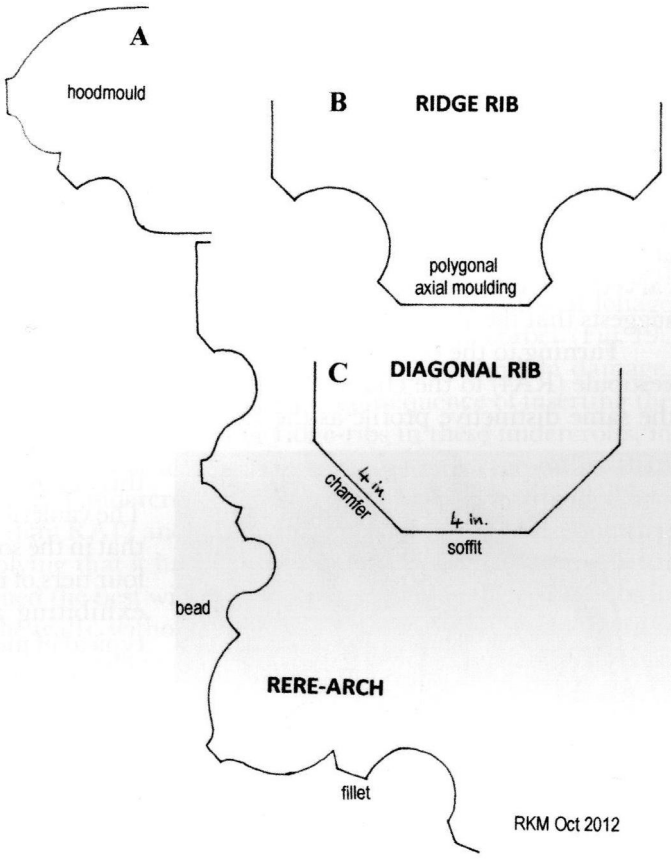


Fig. 17
Great chamber undercroft, moulding profiles. A. Window rere-arch (¼-scale); B. Ridge rib; C. Diagonal rib (B and C not to scale).
Drawing, R. K. Morris

At each end of the chamber undercroft is a large aperture for a window, the east one blocked and the west one containing a Victorian pastiche of a 14th-century two-light window,[49] but both preserve original rere-arches with excellent mouldings and headstops (Fig. 8). The profile is characterised by fussy bead and fillet mouldings (Fig. 17A), which never appear in the mouldings of the new east end of the cathedral, except apparently in the rere-arches of the choir clerestory, thus amongst the last work to be done and probably around 1250.[50] The arches of the main arcade and triforium of the cathedral choir (bays 2-4) are distinguished by ogee keel mouldings and beaked rolls typical of the first half of the 13th century, and not found amongst the Old Palace mouldings.[51] The only other work in the cathedral which comes close to their style is the 13th-century processional door from the east walk of the cloister, which is rather neglected in the literature and not precisely dated.[52] The use of extra beads and fillets in arch mouldings began to appear in English Gothic in the 1220s and 1230s, but only became the norm during the second half of the century.[53] A major work in the vicinity of Worcester which exhibits this trend is the remodelled north transept of Hereford Cathedral (*c.*1256-68) and the monument within it of its builder, Bishop Aigueblanche (Aquablanca),[54] and this probably provides a reasonable yardstick for the likely earliest dating of the chamber undercroft at the Old Palace.

The carved stops of the window hoodmoulds depict a pair of bishops – would that we knew who they were meant to represent[55] – and a man and a courtly lady (Fig. 18). The woman wears a wimple securing a wide cap or headdress, covering a bunch of hair at each side of the face, a fashion which may be found, for example, in female heads carved on vault bosses in the Angel Choir of Lincoln Cathedral (1256-80) and which suggests that the Worcester head should probably not be dated earlier than the 1260s.[56]

Turning to the other medieval rooms of the palace at basement level, the entrance vestibule (RA4) to the chamber undercroft should be contemporary. Its vault employs the same distinctive profile as the ridge rib of the hall vault in its diagonal ribs (there is no ridge rib), the only other example of this design for ribs in the palace (Fig. 17B). The vault ribs spring from corbels, of which that in the south-east corner is carved with four tiers of roll-and-fillet type mouldings, exhibiting an elaboration and variety typical of moulded capitals and corbels by the mid-13th century.[57] The quadripartite vaults of the other three undercrofts – at the north-west (RA2/3), the south-west (RA12) and the south (RA13) – all employ exactly the same rib profile as that for the diagonal and transverse ribs of the chamber undercroft: a plain chamfer profile using root-2 geometry, with a 4-inch soffit and 4-inch chamfers (Fig. 16C). This is a common design for ribs from the

Fig. 18
Great chamber undercroft, headstop of a woman on the west window.
Photograph, C. Guy

Fig. 19
Undercroft RA13, carved corbels from the centre springing points of the vault.
Photographs, R. K. Morris

late 12th century on, but the fact that the same rib measurements are used in all the undercrofts strongly suggests that they were all constructed relatively close in time. As in the chamber undercroft, the vaults in RA12 and RA13 spring from pear-shaped moulded corbels, and additionally the centre corbels in RA13 are carved with stiff-leaf foliage (north corbel) and a grotesque human head, somewhat damaged (south corbel) (Fig. 19). These two carvings deserve to be better protected from damp and random damage, particularly as they are almost at floor level, probably the consequence of inserting the vault into an earlier room.[58] There are no bosses or ridge-ribs in these undercrofts, in contrast to RA1, which may indicate that they were primarily for storage rather than residential. However, the north-west undercroft (RA2/3), which was always divided into two rooms, is loftier internally than RA12 and 13 and traces of painted red false-jointing are traceable on its walls, implying that it had a residential purpose: the lost medieval floor above potentially contained the best withdrawing room of the palace. The ribs in RA2/3 spring directly from the walls, without corbels, but this does not mean that it is earlier in date:[59] in fact the buildings archaeology indicates that it has been built against the chamber undercroft and thus is secondary to it, though probably not much later.

The great chamber (RC31) has lost almost all its 13th-century features over time, but it still retains some good original fabric in the five-light west window, albeit much compromised by later changes and restoration (Fig. 20). The style of these details supports the assumption that this chamber must be contemporary with its undercroft below. The large rere-arch employs a common profile for framing apertures in this period, a roll-and-fillet moulding flanked by deep hollows and fillets;[60] this is simpler than the rere-arch of the end windows of the chamber undercroft, but the same design as that of a single lancet window in the north wall there. The four headstops between the window

Fig. 20
Great chamber, west window, interior detail at the head.
Photograph, R. K. Morris

lights, which include the head of a king, appear comparable to those in the chamber undercroft, as far as it is possible to see them from the ground.[61] The general form and position of the window are probably original, but the contorted form of the hoodmould suggests remodelling, and the fabric of the present mullions and transom are modern, presumably Victorian (probably after 1842).[62] The mullion profile has a polygonal termination, a moulding that characterised Perpendicular mullions from the later 14th century on (e.g. Worcester Cathedral chapter house, new windows of *c.* 1386),[63] and so it is possible that the window was remodelled at about this time and that the modern mullion is a pastiche of a late medieval one. One may speculate that the window lights were lengthened downwards at this time, and that the Perpendicular transom represents the level of the 13th-century sill, hence the unconventionally low position of the transom.

For the 13th-century window, one would anticipate wider uprights between the lights, but nonetheless these may have been of bar-tracery construction (i.e. mullions) rather than coursed wall masonry, and, if so, the date is unlikely to be before the 1260s. Moreover, if the heads of the lights were cusped originally, which seems likely (see further below, the chapel and solar), this feature was coming into wider use only in the 1270s (e.g. Hailes Abbey (Glos.), new east chevet, 1271-77).[64] There appears to be surviving fabric in the cusping of the original profile for the heads, using an axial roll-and-fillet

flanked by hollows, which would be generally comparable to profiles used in the heads of the 1270s windows at Hailes and also those in the north transept of Hereford Cathedral mentioned above.

The current chapel (RC30) incorporates the former chancel of the medieval chapel, and the details of its south window argue for a date close to that of the great chamber and its undercroft. The five-light window may well be in its original position, like the piscina below it, providing the main source of light to the chancel.[65] The overall form of the window, in which the two pairs of sidelights are lower than the centre one, is slightly different to that of the great chamber west window, where the five lights are of staggered height (cf Figs 12A, 11A). However, all the details are very similar, including cusped heads to the lights, and the profile of the chapel window rere-arch is close to that of the chamber undercroft windows, with the use of extra fillets.[66] Some impression of the original mullions between the lights of the great chamber window is probably given by the chunky mullions of the chapel window, even though heavily restored: the use of an axial roll-and-fillet correlates with the traces of evidence for the detail of the great chamber mullions. The piscina has a trefoil-cusped arch and mouldings in keeping with those of the window rere-arch above.

The chamber called the 'solar' (now subdivided, RB13-17), has the most interesting medieval fabric of any room on the principal floor on account of two relatively well preserved early bar-tracery windows, which deserve to be better known (Fig. 21). An extremely important point is that the profile of the rere-arch, which can be recovered from under many layers of paint especially in the section of the northernmost window surviving in the modern kitchenette, is from the same template as that used for the chamber undercroft (Fig. 17A), thus confirming that these works should be virtually contemporaneous. If the present form of the mullion's exterior profile is more or less faithful to the original (Fig. 21), then the earliest instance known to the author – an axial roll-and-fillet flanked by chamfer mouldings – appears in the clerestory window of the Lincoln Angel Choir (1270s). More locally the mullion profile of the same decade from Hailes Abbey (1271-77, as above) is of the same type (but without the fillet), whereas those in the Hereford north transept (1256-68) employ the earlier mullion form with a detached shaft rather than a roll-and-fillet moulding. The plain interior profile

Fig. 21
The southernmost bar-tracery window of the 'solar'.
Photograph, R. K. Morris

of the palace mullion has rebates cut into it like a number of other surviving examples in secular works across the 13th century, and probably indicates that internal shutters were intended.[67] The window pattern of two lights with a quatrefoil in a roundel in the head, executed in bar tracery technique, is not used in the new east end of the cathedral, and should be dated at least a generation later on account of the maturity of its details, such as the cusped archlets of the lights (Fig. 21). The earliest significant display of bar tracery in the general area is in the Hereford north transept (1256-68), but with uncusped lights, and one needs to go into the 1270s for more comparable parallels: Hailes Abbey again (1271-77), Tintern Abbey in the choir aisles (after 1269) and Acton Burnell church (Shrops., *c.*1275-80).

There is one later Gothic feature of interest preserved in the palace, in the ruins of the north wing (the 'early Tudor kitchen'). Its fabric has been ascribed to the tenure of Bishop Alcock (1476-86), but the surviving window – two trefoil cusped lights with a slightly squashed quatrefoil in the head – looks more 14th century than 15th in its design and detailing (Fig. 22). The chunky mullion profile uses a rather common large hollow chamfer.

One closing observation is that the 13th-century work which survives is relatively plain. For example, no use is made of detached shafts in door and window openings, in comparison, say, with Bishop Jocelyn's palace work at Wells (*c.*1220-40), but possibly this is a reflection of the Worcester palace's later date, by a generation or more.

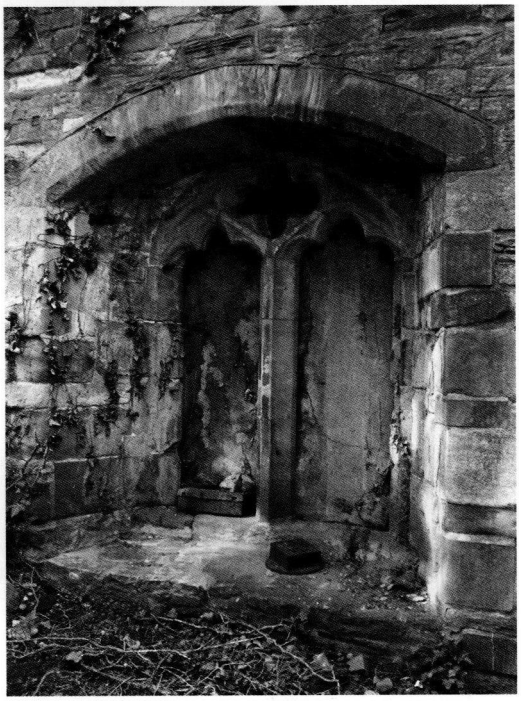


Fig. 22
Former north range, window in south wall.
Photograph, R. K. Morris

CONCLUSION

There is every reason to believe from the above analysis of the fabric that all the 13th-century works in the Early English Gothic style belong closely together in time. It has been shown that the more precise comparisons for the mouldings and other details do not support dating much earlier than *c.*1260, and indeed that the use of bar tracery and associated details incline one to the 1270s. This is the most likely decade because by *c.*1280 the use of the stiff-leaf convention for foliage carving was disappearing. On this basis, Bishop Giffard (1268-1302), in the early years of his episcopate, emerges as the most likely patron, rather than Bishop Cantelupe (1236-66); though one cannot eliminate the possibility that Giffard continued works for a grand new palace begun by the latter.[68] In the troubled last years of Cantelupe's tenure, Worcester had been besieged

and sacked by baronial troops in 1263,[69] when quite possibly the old palace had been seriously damaged and a replacement might have become a necessity. Bishop Godfrey Giffard came from the very powerful Giffard family[70] and was a former chancellor of England. He was permitted by Worcester Cathedral Priory 'to erect a new see house outside the walls [of the monastery]' in 1269, and in 1271 he was 'licensed to crenellate his palace in the manner of a castle'.[71] This may well refer to the construction of a large fortified gatehouse on the east, incorporating a prison, and defensive walls around the palace precinct. Thus, in the main our findings reaffirm Sir Harold Brakspear's dating of the Gothic palace,[72] but laying out the stylistic evidence for the date in more detail and emphasising the case for a lost great hall to the east. Unfortunately, there is insufficient evidence to write as precisely about the Norman residence, except to note that at its core were apparently two stone-built chambers over undercrofts, at right-angles to each other, in the southern half of the existing palace structure.

We are very conscious that this brief introductory study has of necessity had to skate over some issues and omit discussion of others.[73] The fabric of the Old Palace has certainly still more to tell us about its history, and justifies a full published report integrating the study of all existing features with critical account of all the documentary evidence. Another essential element should be a geophysical survey of the palace grounds and precinct, particularly to check for evidence of a large former great hall, whether to the east or south. Indeed, there can be no doubt that Worcester Old Palace is a significant medieval building deserving to be much better known, and retaining much potential for important further research and publication.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are extremely grateful to Frank Bentley, formerly archdeacon of Worcester, for conducting us with such enthusiasm to the many corners of the palace, for the enjoyable discussions we have had with him and for sharing some of the documentary research done in advance of publishing his guidebook. We are also grateful to Christopher Guy, the Cathedral Archaeologist, for sharing his intimate knowledge of the palace with us and explaining his observations on site. Special thanks go to Dr Edward Peters, former architect in charge, for most generously providing us with copies of plans and drawings, courtesy of ASTAM GBC Consultancy, as well as of his own notes on various discoveries during works at the palace during his time as architect. All three of the above have provided extensive comments on the first draft of this article, which have considerably improved its accuracy. Dr Peters also supplied copies of drawings made by a London architect, Sydney Vacher, in 1880, which have been especially helpful to Jill Atherton in creating the new section drawings. It would need a second article to do full justice to everything Dr Peters has copied to us, mostly relevant to the palace's post-medieval history. We are grateful to Robert Higham, Diocesan Secretary of the Diocese of Worcester, for permitting and facilitating our research on site and for commenting on this text, and to the staff at the palace for their assistance. Richard Morris would also like to thank Philip Lankester for advice on the figure sculpture. Dr Anthea Harris very kindly has permitted her photographs to be used for illustration, as has Christopher Guy. Any errors or omissions in this paper remain the responsibility of its authors.

NOTES

1 See *TAMS*, 56 (2012), 9-32 for N. A. D. Molyneux, 'Hartlebury Castle, Worcestershire: An Introduction to its Architectural History'.

2 *Victoria Counties History (VCH), Worcestershire*, IV (1924), 406-08; F. Bentley, The Old Palace Worcester: a short history and guide (Worcester Old Palace, 2010, for the 'Church House Trust'); J. Hunter and C. Guy, 'The Old Palace, Worcester', in C. Guy (ed.), Archaeology at Worcester Cathedral: Report of the Twentieth Annual Symposium March 2010, (Worcester Cathedral, 2011), 25-31. Patrick Faulkner also made an inspection in 1975 at the invitation of the Surveyor, Bernard Ashwell (pers. comm., Edward Peters; but we are not aware of any subsequent publication).

3 See plans in Hunter and Guy, 'Old Palace', figs 3-5.

4 Though Christopher Guy reminds us that the bishop would be the titular abbot.

5 R. Willis, 'Architectural History of the Cathedral Monastery of Worcester', *Archaeological Jnl* XX (1863), 83-132, 254-72, 301-18.

6 Ibid., 85-6.

7 R. Willis, 'The Architectural History of the Conventual Buildings of the Monastery of Christ Church in Canterbury', *Archaeologia Cantiana* VII (1868), 1-206.

8 J. Rady, T. Tatton-Brown, J. A. Bowen, 'The Archbishop's Palace, Canterbury', *British Archaeological Assn Jnl* 144 (1991), 1-60.

9 D. Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England* (2nd edn 1963), 119sqq; see also his discussion of Worcester, 159-63.

10 *VCH Worcs.*, vol. IV (1924), 406-08.

11 These features are very well illustrated in the photograph in Bentley, *Old Palace*, 2.

12 For Highley stone at the cathedral, see J. Prentice, 'The Building Stones used in the Cathedral', in P. Barker, *A Short Architectural History of Worcester Cathedral* (Worcester 1994), 115-16; and U. Engel, Worcester Cathedral: an Architectural History (Phillimore, Chichester 2007), 71-2.

13 Measurements kindly supplied by Christopher Guy.

14 The present floor level of this court is at ground-floor level, and almost certainly post-medieval; it is not known what lies beneath it at basement level (see plans).

15 The mouldings of the stone surround suggest that this door opened out of the east-west chamber, thus implying that at one time there was an adjacent building here.

16 *VCH Worcs.*, vol. IV (1924), 407.

17 This is also Christopher Guy 's interpretation of this wall (pers. comm.).

18 Christopher Guy (pers. comm.) notes that 'there is a chamfered plinth on the west face of the north end of the wall [the east wall of RA7] and an integral bench on its east side in RA4 (although the wall above the bench has been rebuilt). Another reason for thinking this wall is early (certainly earlier than RA1) is the fact that the doorway from RA4 into RA1 is right against the west wall of RA4 and the bench has been cut back to accommodate it, suggesting re-use of an earlier structure'.

19 The return of the east wall of RA6, as far as the east door, is at right-angles to the south wall and thus apparently a survival of this early structure as well. Much is concealed by modern brick facing in this area. Also, when the brick-vaulted servants' passage was added, perhaps in the 18th century, it was built up against this east wall and so perpetuated this early medieval alignment.

20 We are grateful to Christopher Guy for this observation. The fragment of wall with a plinth on its east face, excavated by him in 2011 in RA11, may also relate, but he thinks it is unlikely (pers. comm.).

21 See J. Blair, 'The Twelfth-Century Bishop's Palace at Hereford', *Medieval Archaeology* XXXI (1987), 59-72. At Worcester, the possibility should be considered that the north wall of room RB12, which is not directly over the north wall of undercroft RA13 (as noted above), might be a partial survival of the south wall of an early great hall.

22 See, for example, T. Tatton-Brown, 'Jocelin of Wells as a palace builder', in R. Dunning (ed.), *Jocelin of Wells: Bishop, Builder, Courtier* (Woodbridge 2010), 101-09.

23 Rady, Tatton-Brown and Bowen, 'Archbishop's Palace', 6-10.

24 In parallel with this, bishops also built new houses (or 'inns') in London.

25 There is no record of lead being removed from a great hall in the Cromwellian period; pers. comm., Frank Bentley.

26 For an overview, see Tatton-Brown, 'Jocelin of Wells'.
27 *VCH Worcs.*, IV, 408.
28 Ibid., 408.
29 Pers. comm., Christopher Guy, who adds that the entrance courtyard may have been raised in Bishop Hough's time to accommodate his new east facade of *c.* 1723.
30 The existing south exit from the upper vestibule (from RC18 into RC17) is a lancet-shaped doorway with continuous Gothic mouldings (apparently in plaster) unlike any of the genuine medieval ones in the palace, but in a Middle Pointed style beloved of Victorian ecclesiologists, and the likelihood is that it dates from the post-1842 Deanery period in its present form.
31 We are grateful to Frank Bentley for sharing this point from his unpublished archival research with Barbara Ronchetti.
32 See Molyneux, 'Hartlebury', 11-15 and fig. 2. Also, Barbara's Ronchetti's archival research reveals that Alcock (who was President of the Council of the Marches) erected a large building 100 feet long at his Tickenhall manor to accommodate a meeting of the Council there; the Council was also convened at Worcester, but there seems to be no specific information about where the meeting was held. Thanks again to Frank Bentley for these notes, and he adds that the statement in his guidebook (Bentley, *Old Palace*, 9) that Alcock built a detached hall at Worcester needs reconsideration.
33 The piscina, with its medieval paintings, is well illustrated in Bentley, *Old Palace*, 8.
34 The north bay of the undercroft has been shortened by post-medieval alterations.
35 The small doorway in the west wall at basement level suggests this, rather than a staircase. There is now no reciprocal door at principal floor level, but the way that the west window of the great chamber (RC31) is offset to the south implies a missing feature here, such as a door.
36 Royal Commission Historical Monuments (England), *Salisbury: The Houses of the Close* (HMSO 1993), 53-72, esp. 59, fig.18.
37 The 18th-century room, 'The Gallery', also implies this special quality.
38 Bentley, *Old Palace*, 9, where the kitchen is attributed to Bishop Alcock (1476-86).
39 The northernmost window is half obscured by Bishop Stillingfleet's block of 1691-3.
40 Bentley, *Old Palace*, 5.
41 We have not considered here the curious row of indentations, sometimes interpreted as corbels, along the east wall internally of the solar, which are not easy to explain (see Fig. 11A (a)). See Bentley, *Old Palace*, 3; Hunter and Guy, 'Old Palace', 28.
42 Transcript kindly supplied by Edward Peters. Sadly much of the site of the gatehouse was built over with the construction of Deansway in 1935.
43 There is not space in this article to describe *ex situ* details from the 'Norman' period, such as the double scalloped capital re-used upside down high up in the exterior of the north wall of the great chamber.
44 The refurbishment was directed by Stephen Sedwell of ASTAM GBC, and has brought the room back into regular use as a meeting and function room.
45 The 'north-south' undercroft at Coventry; see R.K. Morris, 'The Gothic Architecture of Coventry Cathedral and Priory: Keeping Up Appearances?', in L. Monckton and R.K. Morris (eds), *Coventry: Medieval Art, Architecture and Archaeology in the City and its Vicinity*, British Archaeol. Assn Conference Trans XXXIII (2011), 76-80 and fig.8B.
46 Engel, *Worcester Cathedral*, 137 and fig.132.
47 For mouldings' terminology, see further R.K. Morris, 'An English glossary of medieval mouldings', *Architectural History* 35 (1992), 1-17.
48 For the aisle rib, see R. Plant, 'The Romanesque and Early Gothic Cathedral', in Monckton and Morris (eds), *Coventry*, 62-4 and fig.6C; for the later rib, see Morris, 'The Gothic Architecture of Coventry', in the same volume, 80 and fig.6D. Ribs with a polygonal axial moulding forming five sides of an octagon appear in the north midlands in the naves of Lincoln and Lichfield cathedrals and in the lost chapter house of Hulton Abbey, works spanning the 1230s to 1270s; R.K. Morris, 'The Architecture and Worked Stones', W.D. Klemperer and N. Boothroyd (eds), *Excavations at Hulton Abbey, Staffordshire, 1987-1994*, Society for Medieval Archaeol. monograph 21 (Maney, Leeds 2004), 83-5 and fig.3.

49 Not dissimilar to the cathedral chapter house windows of the 1380s.
50 Their probable existence in the choir clerestory is based on an observation from the ground, and should be checked close-up.
51 See Engel, *Worcester Cathedral*, fig.17D.
52 Its details, like the triple roll bases on its shaft, imply a date in the third quarter of the 13th century.
53 For the early development in prestigious works in southern England, see R.C. Turner *et al*, 'The Great Tower, Chepstow Castle, Wales', *Antiquaries Journal* 84 (2004), 272-6; the use of these details in the arcade arch of the Marshall family's work at Chepstow, probably 1230s, is precocious and not particularly similar to the Old Palace mouldings.
54 R.K. Morris, The Architectural History of the Medieval Cathedral Church', in G. Aylmer and J. Tiller (eds), *Hereford Cathedral: a History* (Hambledon, London 2000), 213-18 and fig.11.
55 They might be contemporary or historic (e.g. Wulfstan); the only real differentiation is that the right-hand one has jug ears.
56 At Lincoln Angel Choir, bosses depicting two women's heads in the east bay of the north aisle, and two lovers between the fourth and fifth bays. The stylishness of the Old Palace headdress contrasts with the 'pill-box' cap on the Purbeck marble effigy of an unknown lady in the north retrochoir aisle of Worcester Cathedral, the nearest local parallel and probably earlier (but unfortunately undated).
57 For example, in the triforium of Worcester Cathedral choir and the chapter house undercroft of Wells Cathedral.
58 RA13 is currently used as a general store.
59 Cf. Bentley, *The Old Palace*, 3.
60 The rere-arch is considerably repaired with what appears to be plaster and the sharpness of its details lost in places, but it seems to be basically original.
61 These headstops deserve close inspection and recording, as does the whole head of the window. For this paper I have not examined the corbel heads supporting the roof beams on the north and south walls; Bentley, *The Old Palace*, 7, suggests that some may come from an earlier building and that some are probably replacements of the Georgian period.
62 The transom is not a Victorian invention, as it appears in Ross's drawing of 1809 of the west elevation; pers. comm., Edward Peters.
63 See R.K. Morris, 'The development of later Gothic mouldings in England c.1250-1400, Part II', *Architectural History* 22 (1979), 12. The appearance of this feature in windows has a different chronological pattern to its use in vault ribs (cf. the ridge ribs of the lower hall).
64 The church at Hailes was demolished to its foundations after the Dissolution, but a window from the east end was rebuilt into the tower at Teddington parish church nearby. The sharpness and shape of the cusping in the great chamber window would suggest that it has been re-shaped after the 13th century.
65 Bentley, *The Old Palace*, 8, suggests the window may have been moved from the demolished chapel nave, but the piscina is evidently *in situ* because it retains traces of medieval painting on its back wall.
66 There are no carved headstops, in contrast to the great chamber and lower hall windows.
67 Similar interior profiles are found, for example, at Chepstow Castle, great tower (phase 2, 1230s), and in the works of Bishop Burnell (of Bath and Wells) at Acton Burnell Castle (Shrops., *c.* 1285) and the contemporary great hall at Wells Bishop's Palace.
68 This is to gloss over any possible involvement in palace works during the brief tenure of Nicholas of Ely, the intervening bishop between Cantelupe and Giffard, who was also a royal chancellor and treasurer.
69 *VCH Worcs.* II (1906), 204.
70 Godfrey's father, Hugh, had been 'keeper' of King Henry III's first-born son (the future Edward I), and Godfrey's brother, Walter, was also a chancellor of England, bishop of Bath and Wells (1265-66) and archbishop of York (1266-79).
71 *VCH Worcs.* IV, 406.
72 In *VCH Worcs.* IV, plan on p.407, caption; F. Bentley, *The Old Palace*, 4-6, neatly summarises the documentary evidence for Giffard as builder, but then attributes much of the fabric to his predecessors.

73 We have not had the opportunity to consult the unpublished reports referred to in Hunter and Guy, 'Old Palace', 25 and 31 (Ronchetti's documentary research, Worcester Cathedral Library Add. MSS. 432A), and 30 (report prepared as part of the Conservation Plan).