

From the *Transactions* of the
Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society

Thornbury Castle

by A. D. K. Hawkyard
1977, Vol. 95, 51-58

© The Society and the Author(s)

Thornbury Castle

By A. D. K. HAWKYARD

ON 9 JULY 1510 Edward Stafford, 3rd Duke of Buckingham, received a licence under the privy seal from Henry VIII to impark 1,000 acres at Thornbury, to fortify, crenellate, and embattle his manor or mansion house there with walls of stone and lime, and to make the building a fortalice or castle.¹ Seven years later on 17 March 1517 he obtained a second licence to impark a further 500 acres.²

It is evident that before Buckingham received his first licence he had begun extensive repairs, and maybe alterations, to the house. The accounts of the ducal cofferer, William Cholmley, for the period between Michaelmas 1507 and Michaelmas 1508 include four payments to Laurence Stubbs, the receiver for Gloucestershire, Hampshire and Wiltshire. Three of these were solely for building and repairs at Thornbury, 20 marks on Tuesday 28 March 1508, £14 on Saturday 16 September, and £50 on the following Monday, while the fourth made on Saturday 17 June for £47 14s. 2½d. was for work at Keynsham abbey as well as Thornbury.³ These sums were in excess of any other known to have been spent on the manor since the duke had obtained seisin of his estates on 7 March 1498⁴ or earlier by his mother, Katherine Wydeville, and his step-father, Jasper Tudor, duke of Bedford, during his minority. The surviving manorial accounts for that time contain no reference to expenditure greater than £6 6s. 11d. all of which went in maintaining buildings which had long been in existence.⁵

The house which Buckingham decided to transform into a castle stood adjacent to the parish church of Thornbury and its churchyard, on a piece of ground which is bounded on its west side by a stream, and which descends gently to the levels along the estuary of the river Severn. Although the house overlooked the vale of Berkeley and the Severn to the rising ground of Monmouthshire, as well as the land to its north, its position was not defensible. Indeed, it is clear that its original owners did not choose its site with defence in mind.

The manor had passed by inheritance to Margaret, the daughter of Hugh de Audley, earl of Gloucester, who had died in 1347, and the niece of Gilbert de Clare, the preceding earl, who had been slain at Bannockburn in 1314. Margaret was taken by Ralph de Stafford, earl of Stafford, as his second wife, and on her death in 1348 he succeeded to her property. The manor was not the prize of Margaret's inheritance, but its importance increased during the 14th and 15th centuries as Stafford's descendants added to the estates in south Wales and the south-west of England.⁶

The house had evolved gradually with the Stafford estates and for the most part its buildings were unpretentious. It was, however, substantial enough to be frequently visited and occupied by Jasper Tudor, who made his will and died there.⁷ The result of this growing administrative importance

1. P[ublic] R[ecord] O[ffice] C66/613, m. 5 (*L[etters and] P[apers Foreign and Domestic of the reign of] Hen[ry] VIII* [ed. Brewer, Gairdner, and Brodie], I, 1157).

2. PRO, C66/628, m. 16 (*LP Hen. VIII*, II, 3022).

3. PRO, SP1/22, ff. 65, 69, 83.

4. PRO, C66/581, m. 25(21) (*Cal. Pat. Rolls*, 1494-1509, p. 131).

5. Staffs. RO, D641/1/2/192-203; PRO, S.C. 6, Hen. VII, 1057.

6. R. Ellis, *The Hist. of Thornbury castle* (1839); R.A.G.H., 'Recs. of an Eng. Manor', *Geneal Mag.* IV (1901), 377-83, 425-31; A. C. Fox-Davies, 'Stafford Attainders', *Geneal. Mag.* IV (1901), 195-205, 235-41; J. M. Langton, 'Old Catholic Families in Glos.: the Staffords and Howards of Thornbury', *Trans. B.G.A.S.*, LXXII (1953), 79-104; K. B. McFarlane, *The Nobility of later Medieval England* (1973), 202-7.

7. PCC 33 Vox (*Test. Vet.*, 430-1); R. S. Thomas, 'The political career, estates, and connections of Jasper Tudor, Earl of Pembroke and Duke of Bedford' (Swansea University Ph.D. thesis 1971), 265-6, 272, 276, 319.

and of its recent use was that Thornbury was one of the two houses owned by Buckingham in 1498 which were in a reasonable state of repair. The other, Maxstoke castle in Warwickshire, had been maintained and extended by Margaret, countess of Richmond,⁸ who had held the young duke's wardship,⁹ but work there had not been completed. For that reason, amongst others, Buckingham was probably advised by his council to make Thornbury his seat: his first visit as owner was made during May 1498.¹⁰

The building inherited by the duke is of significance because the castle designed for him incorporated its principal features, the hall and chapel together with several lesser parts, although it may have been planned to replace these when the reconstruction of the remainder had been finished. Thus the existing timber structure, as well as its site, influenced the design. The manorial building consisted of the usual parts,¹¹ a hall constructed about 1330,¹² with a buttery, pantry, and kitchen with its various offices to the west of the hall, a set of chambers (known as the earl of Stafford's lodging) situated over the buttery and pantry with access by an external stone staircase,¹³ a chapel which was finished in 1435¹⁴ to the east of the hall, a range of lodgings probably erected by Jasper Tudor,¹⁵ some accommodation for the owner and the more important officials, all of which were placed about an inner court, stables, a barn, and more lodgings about an outer court, or one or more smaller courtyards, a hermitage,¹⁶ a prison,¹⁷ and a dovecote, all enclosed by a stone wall which contained at least two gates and several posterns. Two parks with fish ponds, lodges, and pounds at Marlwood and Eastwood completed the amenities.¹⁸

According to the inscription above the present inner gate:

This gate was begon the yere of oure Lorde God MCCCCXI the ij yere of the reyne of Kynge Henri the viij by me Edw' Duc of Bukkyngha', Erle of Herforde, Stafforde, and Northamto'.¹⁹

Work had started on its reconstruction before 23 April 1511, the second anniversary of Henry VIII's accession. During the following year oaks were felled in Marlwood park for use within the castle.²⁰ In 1514 more men were hired from 'divers places' by the contractors,²¹ the scaffolding took Thomas Golde and others two weeks to erect, some windows were fitted with hooks and catches while others were glazed by William Rede,²² and the floor of the wet larder (332 sq. ft) was laid by John Edwardes and his companions, and those of the kitchen and New Building (3,719 sq. ft) by Walter Salter, his

8. W[estminster] A[bbey] M[uniment Room, mss.] 32348. The condition of Maxstoke in 1498 can be inferred from the royal survey of 1521 (PRO, E36/150, f. 52 (*LP Hen. VIII*, III, p. 509)).

9. PRO, C66/564, m. 5(20) (*Cal. Pat. Rolls*, 1485-94, p. 113).

10. Staffs. RO, D641/1/2/200.

11. The manorial accounts for Thornbury between 1327 and 1503 frequently refer to these (Staffs. RO, D641/1/2/116-56, 162-202; William Salt [Lib., Stafford] mss. M538/1-5; Glos. RO, D108/M118-21).

12. Staffs. RO, D641/1/2/116. This may have been reconstructed before 1360 as the account for 1358-9 includes payments for timber for the roof of the *nove aula*, glass for its windows, tiles, crests, and iron work for its louver, and *tabul' Wallen* for its walls (Glos. RO, D108/M118).

13. This solar block containing the Paradise or great chamber was demolished in 1399 only to be re-erected in a modified form in the same year (Staffs. RO, D641/1/2/155). It is called the Earl of Stafford's lodging in the Elizabethan survey prepared between 6 and 9 March 1583 (Glos. RO, D108/M122, f. 9-9d, a manuscript copy of which is to be found in B[ritish] L[ibrary], Stowe mss. 795, f. 59 *el seq.* and a printed version in J. Leland, *Collectanea* (ed. T. Hearne, 1770), II, 268 ff.

14. Staffs. RO, D641/1/2/162-3.

15. In the survey of 1583 called 'the Earl of Bedford's lodging' (Glos. RO, D108/M122) probably because the royal duchy had ceased to exist by that date and the surveyors confused it with the contemporary Russell earldom.

16. Staffs. RO, D641/1/2/173.

17. Staffs. RO, D641/1/2/176. During 1462-3 the constable of Oldbury was fined £5 for allowing a man to escape from it (Staffs. RO, D641/1/2/182).

18. Staffs. RO, D641/1/2/116 *et passim*.

19. This originally ended with the ducal motto, *Dorene savant* (J. Leland, *Itinerary*, ed. L. T. Smith, IV, 106).

20. Staffs. RO, D641/1/2/205.

21. WAM, 22909, m. 1.

22. *Ibid.*, m. 2.

paviours, and roughmasons.²³ Apparently the New Building was nearing completion because the chimney-stacks above the dining chamber are carved with the date 1514. Between 31 March 1514 and 31 March 1515 Cholmley paid £823 9s. 2½*d.* to the receiver for Somerset, Hampshire, and Wiltshire, Thomas Wotton, in his capacity as master of the works.²⁴

In 1515 a wall 80 perches long was built by John Say in Lord Stafford's garden. During the following year a lock was fitted in the duke's closet door by James Smith. Of the progress made in 1517 and 1518 nothing is known except that work continued.²⁵ In 1519 Buckingham, whose finances had been severely strained by the costs of his daughter's marriage in June and by his entertainment of the king at Penshurst in August,²⁶ examined Wotton's book of accounts to ascertain whether any saving could be made in the expenditure on the castle.²⁷ Evidently the retrenchment was so severe that building came temporarily to a stop: the New Building which was constructed mainly of fine ashlar or brick was finished with poorer freestone, and a false roof of elm covered with slate²⁸ was erected over the western and northern ranges of the inner court. Work, however, had been resumed by 1521 when four carpenters were paid 3s. 4*d.* for viewing the timber in the new buildings on 20 January, presumably to establish whether it had suffered any deterioration, and when the new master of works, William Curteys, who was also the duke's treasurer, received £100 on 31 March for 'certain reparacions doon and supplied in and upon' the castle.²⁹ Whatever work was planned, it was interrupted on the arrest, trial, and execution of the duke, and was never re-commenced after 17 May 1521. Later that year the king's surveyors found in the parsonage timber squared for use which they valued at £20, much rough stone in the outer court, a 'goodly sight' of freestone at the east end of the church, and 100,000 Devon slates worth £17 10s. within the manor.³⁰

Until the reconstruction undertaken by the Victorian architect, Anthony Salvin, the building received little structural attention.³¹ During the time it was in the crown's possession sufficient money was spent to allow princess Mary to visit it during the 1520s, and Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn to stop there on a royal progress in 1535; general repairs amounting to £347 4s. 4½*d.* were made in 1547, possibly to facilitate its use by the council in the marches of Wales. Buckingham's son had Thornbury restored to him by Mary on 10 July 1554,³² but he lacked the resources³³ to maintain the castle so that, with the exception of the steward's chambers, it soon became ruinous. From its remains,³⁴ surveys taken in the 16th century,³⁵ and notes and drawings made in the 18th and early 19th centuries,³⁶ the appearance and nature of the castle as it was in 1521 can be deduced and analysed. This cannot be done with the same certainty for any other contemporary

23. *Ibid.*, m. 3.

24. Marquess of Bath, Longleat mss. 6415, m. 7.

25. WAM, 22909, mm. 4-5.

26. For this information I am indebted to my colleague, Miss Carole Rawcliffe, in the History of Parliament Trust, whose study of the Stafford dukes is shortly to be published.

27. An impression of Wotton's book, had it survived, can be gathered from that for Kirby Muxloe castle, Leicestershire, edited by A. H. Thompson in *Trans. and Procs. Leics. Arch. Soc.*, XI (1915), 213-345. The results of Buckingham's scrutiny were noted down in a small paper book (WAM, 22909).

28. PRO, E36/150, f. 4. Normally when the work for a year was completed, the heads of the unfinished walls were protected with straw (L. F. Salzman, *Building in England down to 1540* (1967), 215).

29. PRO, E36/220, pp. 16, 27.

30. PRO, E36/150, f. 22.

31. D. Verey, *Gloucestershire: the vale and forest of Dean* (1970), 380-1.

32. PRO, C66/879, m. 26 (*Cal. Pat. Rolls*, 1553-4, p. 484).

33. Staffs. RO, D641/1/3/12 *et passim*.

34. The present owner, Mr K. G. Bell, generously allowed the writer to examine these in 1968.

35. PRO, E36/150, f. 4; Glos. RO, D108/M122; the ministers' accounts prepared while the castle was in royal possession add several lacunae (PRO, S.C. 6, Hen. VIII, 1058-77), but the administrative records for the castle kept by the royal office of works are lost except for a summary of expenses in 1547 (PRO, E351/3226).

36. S. and N. Buck, *Antiquities*, coll. VIII (1732), 7; A. and A. W. Pugin, *Examples of Gothic Architecture* (1838), II, 28-38; B.L. Add. Mss. 42003, f. 56; 42018, f. 72; 42020, f. 55; 42023, ff. 106-d., 111-12; 42043, f. 59; 42044, f. 55 (Edward Blore's drawings).

project of equal ambition—the only building which is comparable with Thornbury castle, Thomas Wolsey's Hampton Court, was transformed into a yet grander royal palace and in the process was radically altered.

The design of Thornbury castle divides into two parts (FIG 1), the outer and inner courts (wards). The first was constructed of coarsely cut, local stone and the second of ashlar from the Cotswolds: the use of these different stones points to the function and importance of the two parts. The outer court contained lodgings,³⁷ stabling, and stores while the inner accommodated the peripatetic, ducal household as well as the permanent, resident one.

In no way did the castle deviate from the long-established pattern for a building of its kind.³⁸ It was composed of numerous structural units which could be opened or closed as they were needed. Access to these units was gained directly from the court on which they were situated. Because these units were horizontal rather than vertical, entry to those situated on floors other than the ground was effected by means of newel stairs in turrets protruding into the courts. According to the station of the occupant and his dependents turned the number and proportion of the chambers, the size and glazing of the windows, and the inclusion of a fireplace and garderobe. The chambers within a unit led from one to another so that furthest from the entry was the most private. The principal units of the castle were connected by covered galleries and cloisters.

A diagrammatic breakdown (FIG 2) of the original disposition of the chambers around the inner court can be made, and this enables me to restrict my comment to just two of its ranges, the eastern which has disappeared and the southern which was called the New Building. Probably the great hall dominated the eastern range which followed the standard plan. Its one feature of interest was the situation of the chapel which stood to the east of the great hall, a position approximately the same as that of Cowdray, Sussex, which was built about 1520–30 and which was once considered unique.³⁹ The chapel consisted of two parts, an outer chapel where the household could stand to hear services and where at a higher level the duke and duchess had individual pews, each with its own fireplace, and an inner chapel with 22 settles of wainscot for the priest, clerks, and choristers.

The New Building was almost finished in 1521 (so too was the northern range) and it contained the parallel apartments of the duke and duchess, Buckingham's suite being on the first floor and the more sumptuous, a difference not to be explained by his wife's moodiness and their marital estrangement but by a proper observation of degree.⁴⁰ The ducal suite contained two additional chambers, one for those waiting to be let into Buckingham's great chamber and the other (which was situated in a garderobe extension) to store jewels. The second- and third-floor chambers of the south-west tower, above the two respective closets (bedchambers) were shelved to hold the family and estate papers. The quality and 'curious work' of the New Building impressed the royal surveyors: its erstwhile magnificence is indicated by the complex, geometric oriels and the profusion of carving in stone and brick.

The tower at the end of the New Building was connected with the main part of the castle by means of a cloister and a covered gallery which enclosed the privy garden (itself overlooked by the range's oriel front). An extension of the gallery led out of the castle to a pew constructed by the north chancel window of the parish church⁴¹ where Buckingham sat to hear divine service—on 2 August 1514, he received a licence to found beside the church a college of one dean, a sub-dean, eight secular priests, four clerks, and eight choristers.⁴² The gallery and other parts of the building

37. Some of these are discussed in D. A. Pantin, 'Chantry priests and other medieval lodgings', *Medieval Archaeology*, III (1959), 252–4.

38. P. A. Faulkner, 'Domestic planning from the twelfth to fourteenth centuries', *Archaeological Journal*, CXXV (1958), 150–83, 'Castle planning in the 14th century', *ibid.*, CXX (1963), 215–35, and 'Some medieval archiepiscopal palaces', *ibid.*, CXXVIII (1970), 130–46.

39. T. Trotter, *Cowdray* (1934), 39–41.

40. B.L., Cotton ms. Titus B. I. 171.

41. T. Waters, 'Thornbury church', *Trans. B.G.A.S.*, VIII (1883–4), 79–88.

42. PRO, C53/200, no. 4 (*LP Hen. VIII*, 1, 3226(3)).

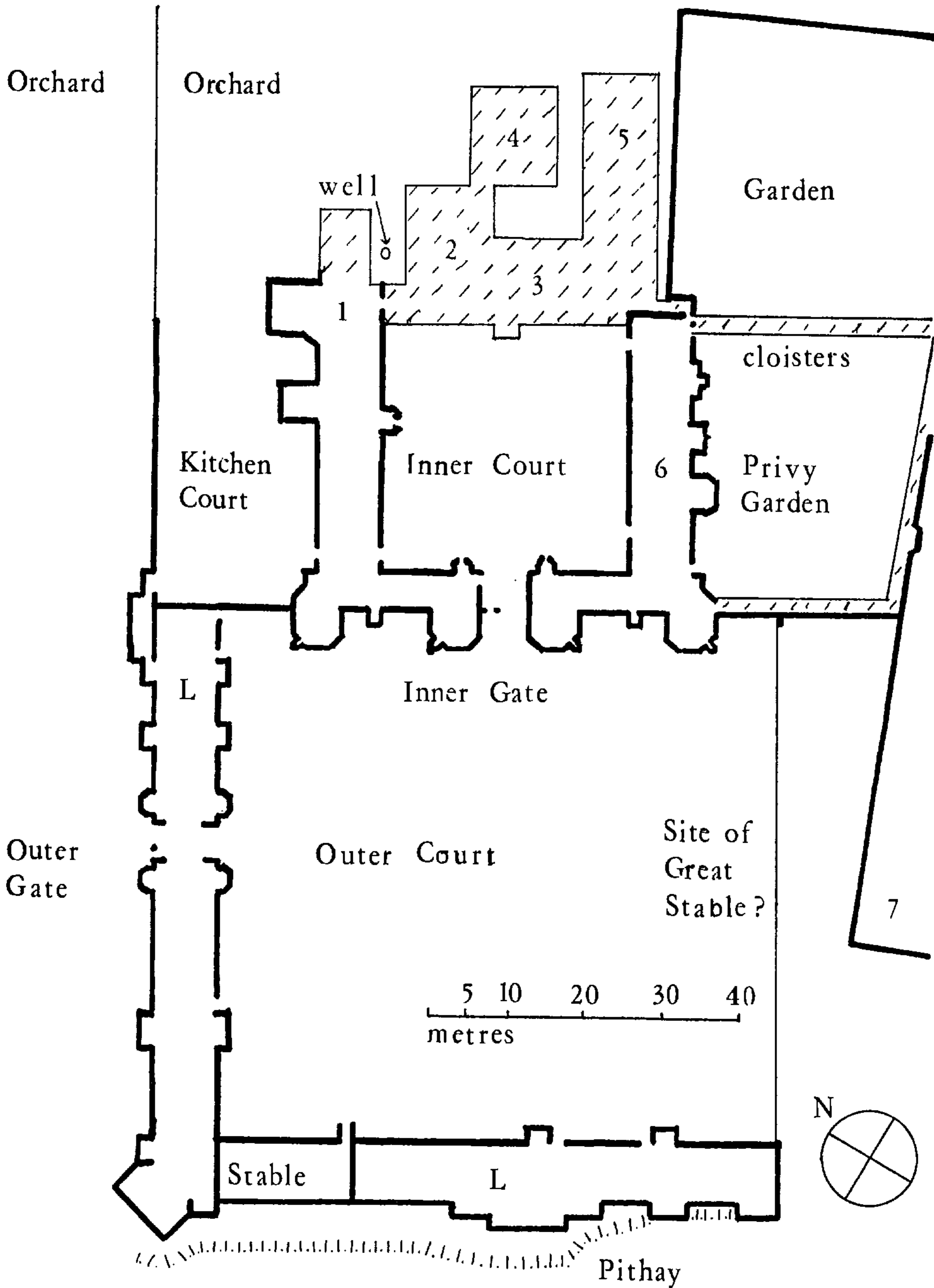


FIG. 1. Thornbury Castle

- | | | | | | |
|-------|--|---|----------------------------|---|---------------------------|
| — | Surviving wall or building | L | Lodgings | 4 | Chapel |
| - - - | Lost wall or building | 1 | Kitchens | 5 | Duke of Bedford's Lodging |
| ▨ | Destroyed buildings known from documents | 2 | Earl of Stafford's Lodging | 6 | The New Building |
| | | 3 | Great Hall | 7 | Parish Churchyard |

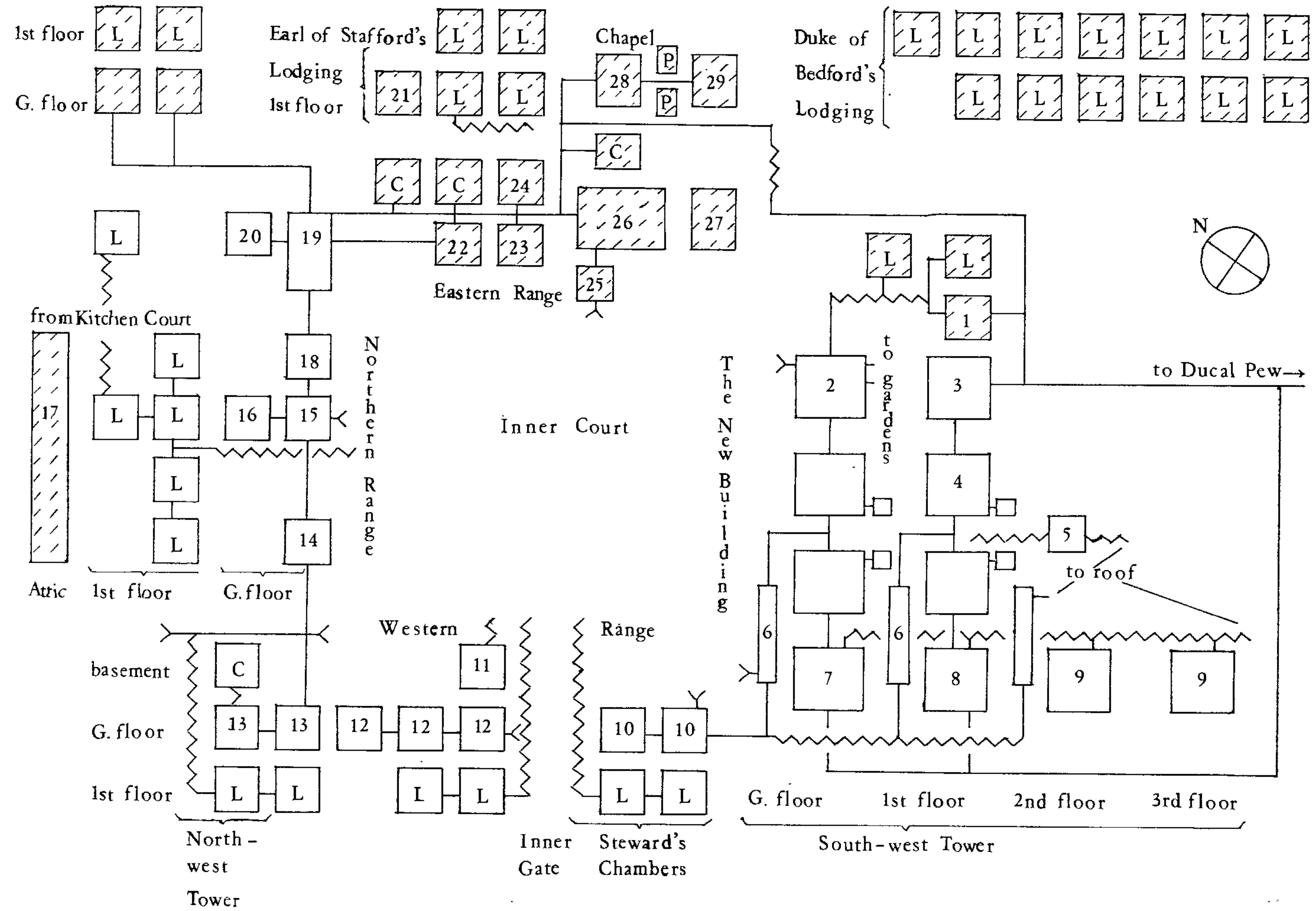


FIG. 2. Thornbury Castle

were tiled with 'bricks', examples of which are still to be seen.⁴³

The privy garden (one-third acre) was not the only one within the castle: to the east of the Duke of Bedford's lodging was another (three-quarter-acre) which was described as 'goodly' in 1583, while besides the chapel lay an orchard (half acre) which was stocked with a variety of trees. The gardens and orchard were set out in alleys and in their walls were roosting places around which grew hazel and whitethorn, a bush much loved by Buckingham.⁴⁴ The gardens were formal, herbs being extensively used and some plants being arranged as Stafford knots.⁴⁵ Vines were also grown within the grounds.⁴⁶

The residential aspect of the castle is the only one to have been considered so far. The building was intended to be fortified, and to that end a licence was obtained. As the work was interrupted before completion, the seriousness with which this prestigious elevation was undertaken cannot be wholly appraised. A number of observations, however, can be made. Its walls and massive towers were to have been battlemented and machicolated. There were, with the exception of the duchess's apartments, few ground-floor windows, light being obtained for the lower chambers by unglazed, crosslet loopholes: there were almost no windows looking out of the building complex. The stream to the west of the building was broadened into a moat, and to this day is called the pithay (ditch). Its extension along the northern side had been started by May 1521 and continues in modified use as a ha-ha. However, by themselves these castellar features cannot be interpreted as evidence of fortification since most buildings until the early 16th century included them.

Proof of the architect's seriousness is to be found in the provision of grooves for portcullis in the outer and inner gateways, the flanking of the gates by towers, the siting of bastions on the outer walls, and the incorporation of gunports in the north-west bastion (6) of the outer court, the outer gate (2), and the inner gate (2). These gunports are at their mouths 8-9 inches across: internally they are splayed. By comparison with those constructed at Dartmouth castle in the 1490s, they are conservative, but too much emphasis ought not to be placed on this as the king's masons were slow to follow the new type. It was intended that in an emergency the ducal residence could be defended, but clearly the building was not planned as a fortress because over the strategically important, inner gate there was to have been an oriel.⁴⁷

The design submitted to Buckingham was one which would have appealed to Henry VII and his court for it emulated Edward III's example at Windsor,⁴⁸ and it should be seen in the context of the

43. In the castle, the Victoria and Albert Museum (A. Lane, *A guide to the collection of tiles in the Victoria and Albert Museum* (1935), 29, pls. 18, 21), and Littleton-on-Severn church (R. Jeffcoat, 'The arms and badges of Edward Stafford, 3rd Duke of Buckingham', *Trans. B.G.A.S.*, LIV (1932), 133-6).

44. PRO, E36/150, f. 26 (*LP Hen. VIII*, III, no. 1288).

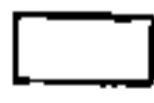
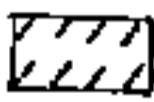
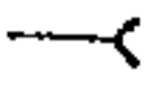
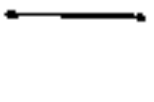
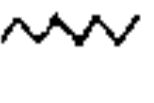

45. Staffs. RO, D641/1/2/202.

46. Glos. RO, D108/M121.

47. The base of this can be seen in two of Blore's drawings (B.L., Add. ms. 42023, f. 106-d.).

48. R. A. Brown, H. M. Colvin, and A. J. Taylor, *The King's Works: the Middle Ages* (1963), 870-82.

Diagrammatic breakdown of Chambers around the Inner Court

	Surviving chamber	5 Duke's Jewel (Privy) Chamber	18 Boiling House
	Destroyed chamber	6 Lobby	19 Kitchen
	External doorway	7 Duchess' Closet	20 Privy Kitchen
	Internal doorway or interlinking	8 Duke's Closet	21 Clerk's Treasury
	corridor	9 Muniment Room	22 Scullery
	Stairway	10 Duchess' Wardrobe	23 Buttery
C	Cellar	11 Dungeon	24 Pantry
L	Lodging	12 Porter's Lodge	25 Porch
P	Pew	13 Duke's Wardrobe	26 Great Hall
1	Waiting Room	14 Wet Larder	27 Outer Hall
2	Duchess' Great Chamber	15 Dry Larder	28 Outer Chapel
3	Duke's Great Chamber	16 Privy Bakehouse	29 Inner Chapel
4	Dining Room	17 Cook Loft	

first Tudor's work at Eltham, Richmond, Westminster, and Windsor.⁴⁹ Under Henry VIII a style incorporating incongruous renaissance features became fashionable at court. The advocates of this style were men for whom the duke cared little and with whom he did not move. Thus it was no surprise to find Thornbury castle devoid of such elements.

Of the original furnishings little can now be said as no inventories are known to have survived. The ducal household was an itinerant one and took its furniture with it. Several items, however, were left permanently in the castle; the great hall was fitted with three coarse verdures, and its windows with mantles emblazoned with swans and curtains with antelopes, the waiting room with two tapestries depicting warfare, and the ducal closet with a green sarcenet curtain.⁵⁰

That the rebuilding was costly would have been implied by the extant building had not any liveries been known. The sum received in 1514-15 by Wotton was almost twice the annual expenditure on Tattershall castle, Lincolnshire (c. 1432-c. 1452),⁵¹ and on Kirby Muxloe castle, Leicestershire (1480-4):⁵² as conceived Thornbury was to have surpassed both these buildings. The figure estimated by Buckingham and his council could not have been less than that for them, and Tattershall probably amounted to over £8,000. At the time that the rebuilding was undertaken, the scheme doubtless ranked among the most prestigious, ambitious, and magnificent in the country: it was, as Leland noted, 'a noble piece of work purposed'.⁵³

January 1977

49. A proper consideration of these must await the publication of the 16th-century section of *The King's Works*.

50. Staffs. RO, D641/1/3/10.

51. W. D. Simpson, *The building accounts of Tattershall castle*. Publications of the Lincoln Rec. Soc., LV (1960).

52. A. H. Thompson, *op. cit.*

53. J. Leland, *Itinerary*, ed. L. T. Smith, v, 100.