

THE BUILDING CRAFTSMEN OF WILLIAM OF WYKEHAM AND THE ‘PATRONAGE SOCIETY’

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ABSTRACT

Studies in medieval architectural history often presume the decisive role of designers and craftsmen rather than how patrons acquired, organised and rewarded their builders. This paper examines this neglected and often problematic issue with reference to the architectural commissions of one of the most powerful men of his age, William Wykeham, Bishop of Winchester (1366–1404). Wykeham’s extensive building aspirations necessitated the co-ordination of considerable labour forces working simultaneously in geographically disparate areas of the diocese. As labour was in short-supply, a result of re-occurring pestilence, ongoing military campaigns and, consequently, widespread impressments of labour, it was essential that he gathered loyal tradesmen and exercised control over them. Hence, bastard feudalism appears to have been a fundamental consideration in the recruitment and organisation of the bishop’s building teams. In exchange for loyalty and service Wykeham’s indispensable builders bettered themselves through association, breaching labour legislation and perhaps even risking the stability of social order itself. This paper offers a discussion on the set of relationships between Wykeham and his builders. In doing so both short and long-term contracts will be considered, as will the mutuality of such arrangements and how lucrative they were to the highly skilled medieval tradesmen.

William of Wykeham’s personal wealth, derived from his diocese, funded a building programme on an unprecedented scale. Among the works he commissioned during his time as bishop were first, improvements to his dilapidated episcopal palaces, second, the perpendicular remodelling of Winchester Cathedral, and,

third, the construction of two new colleges. For the latter two projects, Wykeham drew on his favourable relations with the monarch. Hence in 1383, New College, Oxford, secured royal protection and exemption from tolls and customs to all persons connected with its construction, and Winchester College received a charter of privileges in September 1395. Royal timber from Windsor was used for the tower and cloisters at New College, Oxford between 1396 and 1403. Such patronage was acknowledged through the depiction of Richard II on the external stonework and in the glass of Winchester College chapel.

All such patrons hired specialist craftsmen and labourers for their construction projects. Apparently Wykeham’s methods of securing and rewarding his labour force differed significantly from other ecclesiastical and secular patrons. His dealings with his building staff can be categorised as bastard feudal, that is, ‘the set of relationships with their social inferiors that provided the English aristocracy with the manpower they required’ (Hicks 1995, 1). Such patronage is ill-documented, especially insofar as recompense was often non-financial. Wykeham’s projects took place during a national labour shortage, the consequence of endemic disorder following the Black Death, and Wykeham made best use of his privileged position in Church and State to enlist and secure the loyalty of his workforce. So concerning was the state of the labour market that for works at Windsor, Wykeham ‘impressed nearly every mason and carpenter in England so that hardly any good craftsmen, except deserters were available to any other people’ (Malvern n.d., 30). To ensure loyalty Wykeham extended

the rewards of service beyond those which a secular patron could offer, rewarding his most valued men not only with fees and wages, but also through less tangible spiritual means. In order to understand his system of patronage and reward, we need first to examine the organisation of the bishop's labour force.

Wykeham's building works were structured according to local resources. At New College Oxford, the bishop deployed a two-tier system of craftsmen below that of his architectural advisors. A local skilled and unskilled secular workforce provided the manpower and a small group of specialist migrant craftsmen provided expertise, these latter being temporarily accommodated within the city (Gee 1952, 63). The Winchester situation was significantly different. In absence of accounts of the resident *custos operum* at the Benedictine cathedral priory, surviving rolls from other monastic officials indicate somewhat surprisingly that neither craft lodges nor guilds existed during Wykeham's time as bishop in spite of the scale of his building operations and the contrary experience in other large-scale projects as, for example, at Exeter and York (Erskine 1983, xxiv; Swanson 1983). Wykeham's advisors and supervisory staff were largely drawn from either the cathedral priory or the bishop's own household. Hence, between 1393 and 1406, representing the convent's interests at Winchester Cathedral as master of works (*custos novorum operum*) was Brother John Wayte (BL Harley 328 f.24v; see also TNA E 101/479/24). In 1408 the former almoner, and later sacrist, John Hurst managed labour, which at this time comprised of eight monastic permanent staff; unfortunately, their status within the priory is not recorded (Harwood 1998, 36). Two examples record their organisational responsibilities. In 1398 the cathedral obedientary accounts and the Winchester College compotus rolls record the removal of 112 loads of flint by cart from the cathedral as per contract [with the priory] valued at 9s 4d (HRO Eccles 2/159388; Kitchin 1892, 207, 422, 425; Kirby 1892, 148). In 1404 the prior and convent agreed to supply 'gratis' all scaffolding, digging and carting building materials from their own quarries and to provide

the necessary manual labour by 'their men and tenants wherever they consider it advantageous to the speedier and more successful execution of this work' (Greatrex 1978, 21).

Direct labour and materials were supplied directly from the bishopric estates, as for example the timber provided for works at New College Oxford in 1381/2, but the involvement of ecclesiastical staff is harder to find. Wykeham could effectively draw on both laymen and clerics to forward his architectural ambitions. The construction of Winchester College was quite separate from the priory. Simon Membury, a secular cleric later indentured as treasurer of Wolvesey (Rogers 1921, 306-7), administered the project. Similarly at Windsor Castle the king's master mason John Sponlee worked alongside the administrator Canon Robert Burnham (Roberts 1947, 77-8).

If Wykeham deployed both ecclesiastical and secular administrative staff, then how did he secure the services of skilled craftsmen? The working arrangements of the king's master mason William Wynford (*fl.* 1360-1404) provide some answers to this question. Wykeham influenced Wynford's early rise to prominence, while Wynford in turn has been credited as being the foremost architectural influence on his patron's buildings. This attribution is not as straightforward as previous historians have suggested. In 1364 Wykeham as provost of Wells employed Wynford as master mason at Wells Cathedral (Harvey 1984, 352-3). By 1376 at least, it would appear that the master mason was retained within Wykeham's household. At this time, when Wykeham's temporary fall from political grace caused him to 'brake [sic] up his household', the bishop reputedly 'scattered his men and dismissed them for he could no longer govern or maintain them' (Thompson 1874, 107). It was probably to support himself outside of the household that Wynford immediately forged a close association with the king's master mason Henry Yeveley (*fl.* 1353-1400) and, by 1383, the king's master carpenter Hugh Herland (*c.* 1330-*c.* 1411). This association is not known prior to Wykeham's eclipse.

Unlike several of his contemporaries, docu-

mentary records relating to Wynford's status as a builder or evidence of his business interests, private land or property ownership, remuneration or subinfeudation, are few and far between suggesting that Wynford, unlike other high status craftsmen of the period, had fewer aspirations and little intention of diversifying in order to profit beyond his wages. That Wynford surrendered an annuity of £10 in 1383 and next year broke his association with Yeveley regarding works outside Winchester suggests that Wynford returned to Wykeham's household sometime before the laying of Winchester College's foundation stone in 1387 (CCR 1381–5, 333). Other thought-provoking evidence indicates that Wynford recurrently worked with senior advisors.

If Wynford did indeed commit himself to Wykeham's service alone, it is curious that more established architectural contributors were used on Wykeham's projects. Wykeham's standing at court made Yeveley an obvious architectural advisor for the bishop's works. Between 1378 and 1384 Yeveley and Wynford worked together at Southampton, Waltham and Carisbrooke; Arundel College, which compares to Wykeham's colleges in style, may be another product of this partnership, and fits neatly with Herland's departure from service on the king's work. In 1381 both Yeveley and Wynford were together in Farnham Castle chapel witnessing homage to Wykeham (Baigent 1891, 42). Their co-operation complicates Wynford's status as Wykeham's principal designer.

Indeed, while the Waltham building accounts refer to Wynford as master of all the lord's masonry works, they also show that Yeveley was on site simultaneously supervising the construction of a the new hall (HRO 11M59 Bp BW 19 & 20; Hare 1988, 240). Harvey noticed that the 1389 steward's hall books of New College distinguish the social status of '*magister*' Yeveley, and '*familia*' Herland and Wynford when at New College (Harvey 1957, 56n2). The word *familia* in this case would identify those who were dependent on their lord, that is, those who were hired, residential, or otherwise retained for continuous service (Farmer 1996, 207–36). Indeed Herland worked exclusively for the

bishop, or on Winchester Castle, between 1387 and 1394. Furthermore the close personal relationships that built up between the bishop and Yeveley and, later, Herland, in particular the financial rewards that Wykeham bestowed upon his carpenter, are significant. Between May and September 1386 Yeveley dined nine times with Wykeham at Southwark and between May and September 1392. Herland dined with him nine times at Winchester College (WCM 1). Such prestige and benefits from association were important. There is no corresponding evidence to suggest that Wynford enjoyed the same level of access to Wykeham or ever dined with the bishop without a senior architect as Yeveley or Herland also being present. Could these circumstances go some way in suggesting that Wynford always remained subordinate to Yeveley in design capabilities, monetary wealth, and social status? Perhaps then it was Yeveley and Herland who provided the bishop with architectural plans for his colleges? Could they have even supervised the works for Wykeham? While such a theory may contest our preconceived understanding of their relationship, the argument does deserve further scholarly reassessment.

Wykeham needed to supplement this design team with a loyal group of craftsmen to run a busy site on a daily basis. Wynford appears at most of the bishop's building projects at one time or another and thus may be viewed as Wykeham's senior architectural representative. One of his wardens or undermasters was William Brown who was dedicated to the completion of Wykeham's college building in Oxford. The bishop's most senior and faithful craftsmen were Robert Brewes (or Prewes), William Ickenham (or Hickman) and John Spillesbury (or Billesbury). Brewes was also documented at Highclere, Oxford and Waltham, Ickenham was predominantly based in Winchester, while Spillesbury appears only at Highclere. Whereas there is no evidence to prove conclusively that these craftsmen were retained in any way, they all remained loyal to a single patron and, consequently, defied regulation and impressment. All worked alongside or took advice from more senior consultants, not evidently having

a design remit of their own. Thus Yeveley and Herland sporadically attended the ongoing works at Waltham to advise Wynford and the carpenters Brewes and Ickenham (HRO Eccl 2/195386). All received some outstanding recognition for service clearly distinguishing them from Wykeham's traditional lay workforce.

While a dearth of surviving building accounts conceals most of the rewards of Wykeham's craftsmen, it must be assumed that builders served primarily for pay. Presumably because Wykeham could supply at least some unskilled labour from his estates, he had more difficulty in securing the higher status craftsmen. He certainly openly flouted labour legislation; key masons like John Spillesbury, working at Highclere, and William Brown and John Sampson, both at New College, were paid above the statutory rates (Rogers 1921, 313; Beveridge 1936, 27; Levett 1932-4, 77-80). Brown's continued employment after four prosecutions for excessive pay shows that these actions harmed the reputations of neither the employee nor employer; far from it, retained status often protected the craftsmen from scrutiny. In 1395 Brown was to be paid for advice on Winchester College tower. Prosecutions were not unique to Wykeham's sites and were, in part, a consequence of enhanced London rates rather than an abuse of retainership. Either way 'jurors professed not to know from what persons masons took excessive wages' (SR i.259; ii.3, vii, xiv). Perhaps to maintain a supply of labour, Wykeham extended the benefits of service beyond purely financial incentives in three different ways.

First, the household accounts within the Winchester College muniments reveal that admissions to Wykeham's educational institutions were one incentive of his 'patronage society' (Lytle 1982, 168). Here Wykeham's most prominent builders compare with other members of his household in benefiting from entitlement at the bishop's discretion to the status of 'founder's kin' (Kirby 1899, ii.407-9). The first recorded scholars of Winchester College included John Brewes (or Prewes), William Herland (Kingston-upon-Thames), William Norton (Kenton, Devon) and Laurence

Martyn (Frome). It could, of course, just be coincidental that Robert Brewes, Wykeham's warden at Waltham and at New College between 1388 and 1402, and the Oxford masons Richard Norton and John Martyn were associated with the bishop's building works. What may be linked by more than mere coincidence however are the cases of the scholars William Herland and John Wynford being recorded with their namesakes the craftsmen at New College, Oxford (Harvey 1984, 140, 354); Wynford however is not known to have married or fathered children. Education at Wykeham's colleges offered opportunities to these scholars that some fulfilled. By 1397 William Norton was indentured in the royal wardrobe and latter rose to a high position in the church (Rogers 1947, 307). A Richard Prewes was recorded as clerk of the bishopric in 1404 and John Wynford (Salisbury) was later a monk at Oseney Abbey (Greatrex 1978, 27). In contrast such relationships and rewards do not emerge when comparing the names of Norwich monastic scholars and craftsmen (Greatrex 1991, 555-83).

Second, the inclusion of building personnel and their respective families, in the codicil to Wykeham's own will, indicates further potential rewards of service (Lowth 1759, appendix, xlvii). Among the aforementioned scholars financially rewarded by the bishop were William Norton and John Prewes, presumably for ecclesiastical service. The builders Thomas de la Dene, warden at Waltham, the Oxford masons John Martyn and Richard Norton were rewarded along with the administrators John Wayte and Simon Membury. Rede and Billesbury (Spillesbury) also appear both in Wykeham's will and in some of his associated building projects, although association cannot be conclusively deduced. As far as is known, such rewards are unique within the medieval building trade, and indicate the special status in some cases of builders within the household. Similarly lawyers employed by Winchester College were also Wykeham's legatees (Chitty, n.d.). In two cases, at least, lawyers had forged such close relationships with the priory that they left substantial sums to the cathedral or college fabrics.

Lawyers and builders who were not legatees tended to be independent of the household and often therefore progressed further in their respective trades.

Third, religious advantages were a consideration of service. Wynford was awarded a corrody at Winchester Cathedral Priory in 1399. Although a rare honour, this is not unique: after thirty years of loyal service to Wykeham, Spillesbury received a corrody at Eynsham Abbey, where he had worked on a chapel in 1389/90. Far from being always ill or old, corrodians were often rewarded for long and good service. Wynford's corrody was awarded for 'good services both past and future to them and their cathedral church' and thus reveals Wynford's existing association with the church prior to 1399 (Greatrex 1978, 8–9). His depiction in livery in the east window of Winchester College Chapel suggests that he had some ecclesiastical standing. Such depiction of ecclesiastical tradesmen is not unparalleled. First, an incised stone marking the early-fifteenth-century grave of Master William of Wermington at Croyland Abbey, Lincolnshire depicts him in a monk's cowl and habit holding a compass and square: the inscription reads '*+ ici gist mestre Willm de Wermington le mason a l'alme de ky dev by par sa grace doune absolution*' (Here lies Master William of Wermington, the mason may God grant his soul absolution). Second, a thirteenth-century Hanover bench end now in the Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum in Germany portrays a habited and tonsured man using carving tools, compass and set square. If Wynford was never a monk, he was certainly a member of the priory fraternity and a *familiaris* of the bishop eligible to wear episcopal livery. Herland, conversely, received secular rewards in the form of leasing London property from St Swithun's Priory and, in his senior years, being rewarded with a yearly pension from the fee-farm of Winchester (CPR 1388–92, 249, 261; VCHS iii, 490).

Despite Wynford's corrody, his actual status within the priory was relatively low. 'He is permitted, if he so wishes, to take his lunch and supper daily at the prior's hall except when a large number of important people of rank are present' (Greatrex 1978, 9). Wynford's

rewards were similar in many aspects to those given to the doorkeeper of the priory, John Gerveys, in 1406 (Greatrex 1978, 34). Wynford was 'received into the spiritual brotherhood [confraternity] of the monastic chapter' being allotted with a room in the hospice of John Wayte, the master of works, and having access to horses, because his work took him outside of the cloister (Greatrex 1978, 9). Yeveley and Herland, who resided neither in the episcopal household nor within the priory, were licensed by Wykeham to have private oratories shortly before their deaths (Kirby 1899, ii. 497, 543). Wykeham's ability to provide benefaction and spiritual protection in life, old age and finally in death was evidently important. Although we not know where Wynford was buried, his progress through purgatory was assisted by the grant with his corrody 'that there be done for him in life and after death as for one of the brothers of our congregation is wont to be done' (Greatrex 1978, 9). Another instance of spiritual advancement is John Bouke, joint clerk of works at New College, Oxford, who later became its fifth warden, and who was buried in June 1441 before the cross in the chapter of Winchester College (WCM 1). However, more unusual was the case of Wykeham's carpenter William Ickenham who requested in his will, dated 1424, to be buried in the nave aisle of Winchester Cathedral — clearly a high expectation from a less significant craftsman (Harvey 1984, 157).

Such mutuality of service is vital in understanding Wykeham's patronage to his craftsmen and the reciprocal nature of the arrangement. Indeed, builders were no different from the rest of the lay community in that they themselves became patrons in order to create some perpetuity of memory. John Sponlee, the king's master mason and a future corrodian of the Benedictine abbey at Reading was a case in point when he donated a chalice to St George's Chapel (CCR 1364–8, 76–7; Roberts 1947, 89). Such documented physical support to the church remains unusual, but in the impressive east window of Winchester College Chapel appear three of Wykeham's chief building staff *Willms Wynford lathomus*, *Dns Simon de Membury* and

the unnamed *carpentarius*. Such a prominent depiction of Wykeham's craftsmen identifies them as patrons themselves either of some of the building works or of the window itself. What could be a higher reward than physical inclusion within the sacred space alongside the two major patrons, the king and the bishop of Winchester? All three men wear liveried robes and are kneeling in prayer; in line with the 1377 legislation against liveried hats, Wykeham's men do not display such apparel. Livery, the visible recognition of retainership, despite being more common prior to sumptuary legislation, was a rare honour for craftsmen outside the king's work. Stephen Lote and Yeveley himself, however, received liveries of Christchurch and Canterbury priories. Bearing in mind that the glass was replaced in 1821–3, and supposing that the colours therefore are consistent with those of the medieval, then the display of different coloured robes for each of Wykeham's men may distinguish between the clerical and lay orders, between an ordinary and an extraordinary retainer, or between servants of different status (Lachaud 1997, 297–8). Clearly all three were associated in some way with the convent before the glass was installed in 1393. If this is the case then it is more likely that the unnamed *carpentarius* represents William Ickenham rather than the secular carpenter Hugh Herland, as it is often credited.

This concept of glass patronage was certainly evident at St. Neot in Cornwall, where Ralph Harys, donor, glazier, tin investor and, with his son, both probably liveried retainers of the Earl of Devon, are portrayed (Mattingley 2000, 19–21). John Petty, a late-fifteenth-century Yorkshire glazier, left money and glass to ecclesiastical foundations for 'clere absolution be cause I have wrought much work thare' (Swanson 1983, 22). A deleted 1394 entry in the Winchester College account roll for the construction of Outer Gate suggests that such reciprocal patronage may have extended further. A contract was awarded to 'ten strangers, masons and carpenters, making a contract with Master William Wynford'. The only definite example of building labour being hired through the master mason for one of

Wykeham's works. It was, however, cancelled (WCM 22078).

This paper has used surviving documentary evidence and reassessed secondary sources to shed light on how Wykeham retained and supported his labour. It has argued that Wykeham's practices were different from his secular and ecclesiastical counterparts. In times of skilled labour shortages, the bishop exploited non-financial rewards to secure the dedication and trustworthy support from his builders that he required. Often they served for life. Without building accounts for either of Wykeham's colleges and very few records of any financial payments to his builders, we cannot tell how far this mechanism of incentives went. Nonetheless, the system achieved its aims of encouraging new architectural talent, providing Wykeham's craftsmen the chance for social and spiritual progression while retaining their loyalty through mutual reward and patronage. It is noteworthy that after Wykeham's death Wynford's successor, Robert Hulle, took similar rewards from the priory (Greatrex 1978, 38).

John Gower wrote in his *Confessio Amantis* 'The lond is ful of maintenue' (Macaulay 1899, 469). Wykeham indeed relied on it to fulfil his architectural ambitions. Such patronage reached beyond the master craftsmen to Wykeham's own retained builders. Those like Wynford, in particular, but also Spillesbury, Ickenham and most likely Brewes, were clearly professionals who could be incorporated within the household, though whether in a religious or lay capacity we cannot always be sure. One clear benefit of such an arrangement was that the clerks could account for them more easily. Furthermore, rewards given to builders in return for loyalty as, for example, schooling and social mobility, were granted by the bishop to his extended family or, as the Winchester College statutes state, the 'founder's kin'. In view of Wykeham's approach to patronage it is hardly surprising that the mid-fourteenth-century proverb, 'Notions of every manner and clothing maketh man', later adapted for his college of 'Sainte Marie' in Winchester, is itself based on the importance of mediaeval household, livery and maintenance.

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