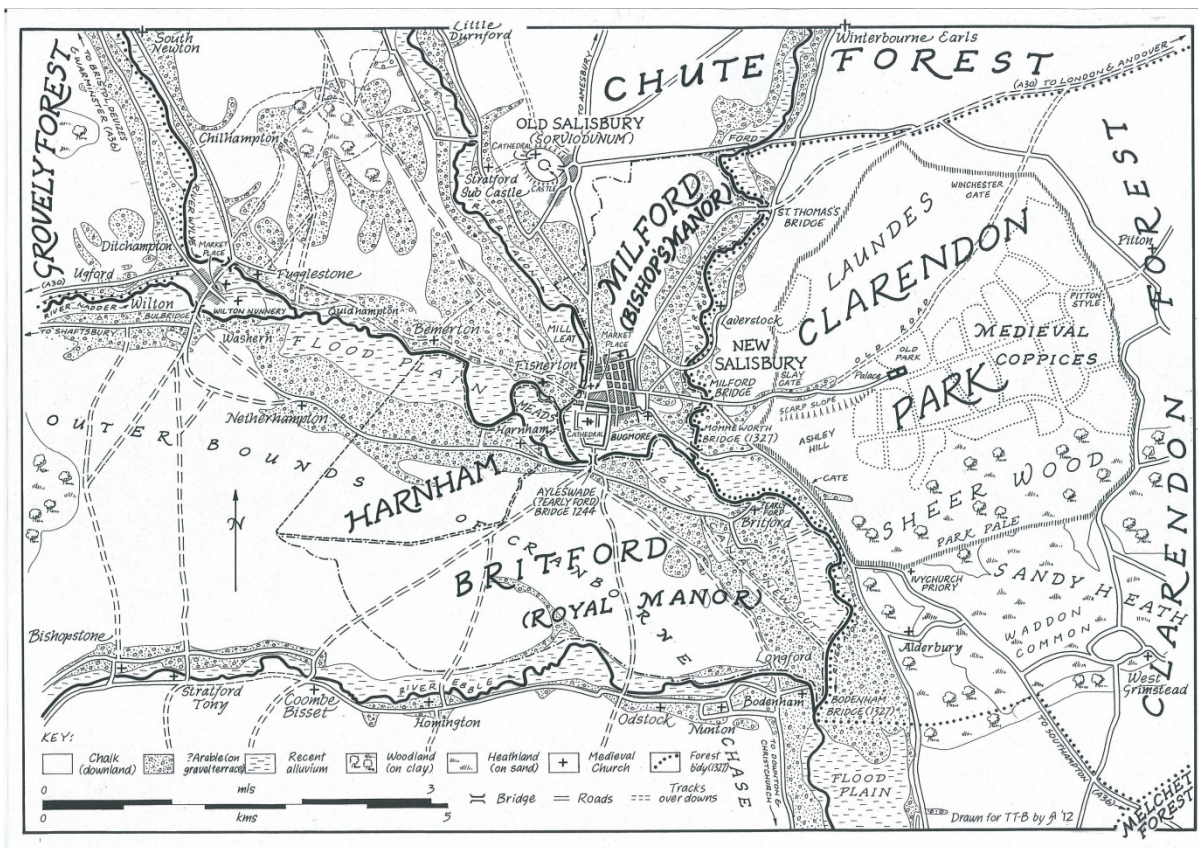


Clarendon Palace, Wiltshire: archaeology and history (notes for visitors, prepared by the Royal Archaeological Institute, 2017)

Clarendon Palace was probably the most spacious royal residence in England at its height in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. On an open site unrestricted by a bank-and-ditch defensive enclosure, the principal rooms as currently interpreted were apparently laid out in a line, with an L-shape created by a courtyard range set at right angles. The attraction of the slightly elevated site was the hunting to be had in the local forests (map drawn for Tim Tatton-Brown by Jill Atherton), and it probably began on a small scale in William the Conqueror's reign, with Sarum Castle used locally for meetings of the royal council. This changed in the reign of Henry II (1154-89), and national affairs of state were conducted at Clarendon, leading for instance to the Constitutions of Clarendon in 1164, and the Assize of 1166 which is credited with formalizing a jury system. Henry's great hall was soon reconstructed, but his wine cellar remained. From the 1220s onwards Henry III expanded the palace, building separate apartment blocks for himself and his queen, each with its own household.

The cost of upkeep was a constant problem, with disrepair being noted even towards the end of Henry's reign. His successors seem to have done at least basic maintenance, as Edward III (1327-77) used it in the Black Death era, probably because of its relative isolation, but by the end of his reign it was not playing a major role in government, which increasingly focused on Westminster. Subsequent monarchs rarely visited, and by the end of the fifteenth century the buildings had largely gone. The park, the largest in medieval Britain, remained in



royal ownership: Elizabeth I hunted in it in 1574, when 340 deer were coursed and a banquet was planned at the palace site, but she stayed overnight at Wilton. James I hunted in the park in 1603, Charles I paid for repairs to the surrounding pale, and Clarendon Park remained well-stocked until the Civil War – its keepers told John Aubrey that they could remember when it had held 7000 fallow deer. The last royal visitor might have been Queen Mary II, as one of her 1689 coronation medals was found on the site in the 1930s.



The east wall of the great hall is all that remains of Clarendon Palace above ground, although footings and foundations have been cleared and consolidated since the 1980s, and can be visited (photograph by 'Toby' reproduced under Common Licence, CC BY-SA 2.0 (Wikimedia)). Henry II's subterranean but now roofless wine cellar also survives.

Model of the palace by Mary South superimposed on an aerial view of the modern parkscape



Visitors to Clarendon could enjoy a 'prospect' of the new cathedral in Salisbury in the thirteenth century (photograph by 'Toby', as above).

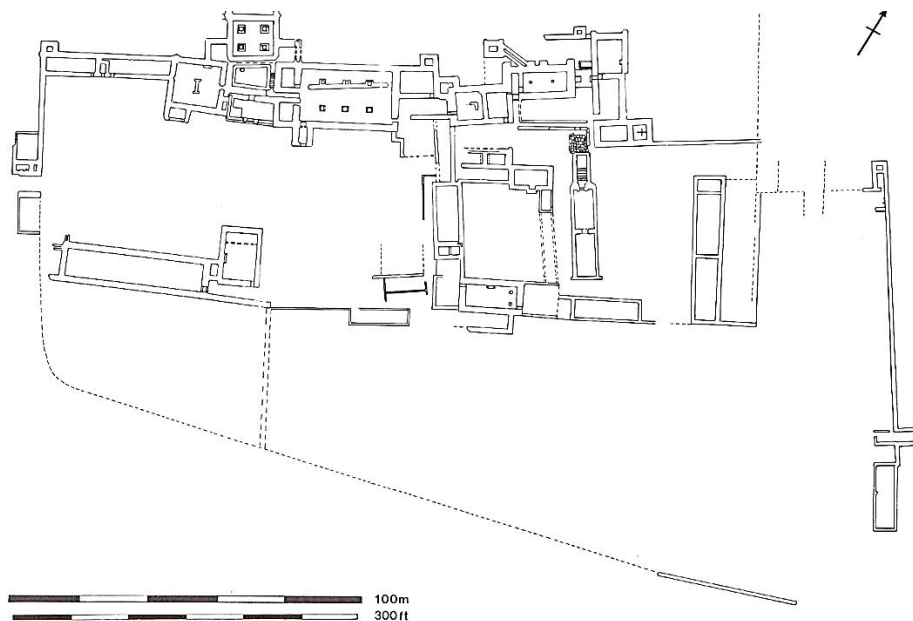


FIG. 14. Reconstruction drawing of Clarendon Palace c. 1275 looking north-east
Drawn by Allan Adams, 1984

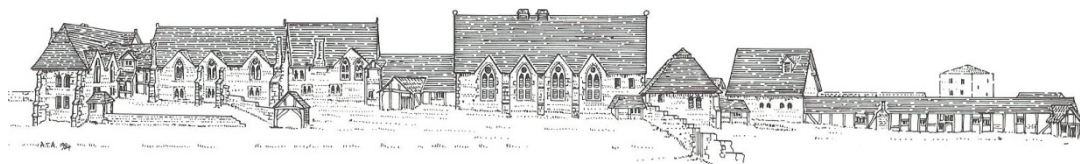
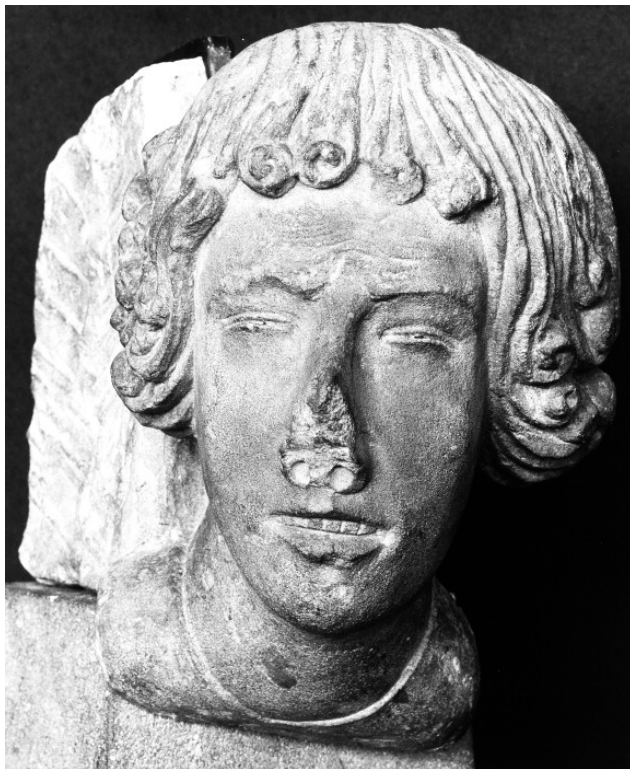


FIG. 15. Reconstruction drawing of the north range of Clarendon Palace c. 1275 looking south
Drawn by Allan Adams, 1984

Plan and reconstruction drawings from James and Robinson 1988

The estate was sold by the Crown in the 1660s, and passed through various owners; a new residence, Clarendon House, was built probably in 1737, enlarged in the nineteenth century, and reduced again in the twentieth (private property). During the ownership of the Christie-Miller family, campaigns of investigation were undertaken, in the 1930s by Tancred Borenius, and in the 1980s and subsequently by Tom Beaumont James, thanks to whom, with notable input from Christopher Gerrard and many volunteers, the ruins have been consolidated and made available for viewing again, with grants from English Heritage. It is now owned by Mr. Marc Jonas. In addition to the ruins, an impression of the arrangement of the landscape for hunting can be seen.

A few survivals excavated in the 1930s give an impression of the magnificent furnishings of Clarendon Palace. Most can be seen in Salisbury Museum (see on-line entry: Salisbury), but two tile floors, from the King's and Queen's apartments, are in the British Museum.



This sculpture of the head of a young man was probably one of a pair, on either side of a door, window or fireplace, carved in the 1240s. The intricacy of his hair styling indicates someone of great wealth. The damage to the end of his nose is unfortunate, but the way that his nostrils are carved in a plane with his cheeks, and the display of rotting teeth, indicate that he had leprosy. The matching head would probably have shown him before he was struck by the disease; together, they would have reminded viewers of the transience of human glory. An alternative is that he is dead, and was paired with his living self, but the message would have been the same (in Salisbury Museum: photograph by courtesy of the Courtauld Institute of

Art, neg. no. A 76/181).

Also from the 1240s work is this surviving part of what would have been a sophisticated, complete circle of clay floor-tiles, made and fired on the site – the kiln was found in the excavations. It was in the first-floor king's chapel (in the British Museum, photograph by courtesy of the Museum).



References and further reading

- JAMES, T. B. AND ROBINSON, A. M. 1988. *Clarendon Palace*, Reports of the Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries of London Volume 45
- JAMES, T. B. AND GERRARD, C. 2007. *Clarendon: Landscape of Kings*, Bollington: Windgather
- RICHARDSON, A. 2005. *The Forest, Park and Palace of Clarendon, c. 1200- c.1650*, Oxford: British Archaeological Reports British Series 387

These notes were originally prepared for the annual meeting of the Royal Archaeological Institute held in July 2016; see www.royalarchinst.org for further information. RAI members have access to the printed Report which contains syntheses of the significance of recent research to archaeological understanding of the county. The notes on Clarendon Palace were prepared by Tom James, Amanda Richardson and Mary South.