

Corridors of power: a case study in access analysis from medieval England

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One of the most important techniques to be applied in medieval archaeology is access analysis, in which the spaces inside a structure are categorised by their relative ease of access and interpreted in terms of privilege and privacy. The author demonstrates the method, taking buildings from Salisbury town and Cathedral Close as a case study.

Keywords: Medieval, England, Salisbury, access analysis, architecture, domestic space.

Introduction

In 1928, the author of *The Growth of the English House*, J.A. Gotch, gave us his view of the architectural liberation brought about by the end of the Middle Ages: 'The whole country blossomed out into buildings that vied with each other in the cheerfulness of their aspect' he enthused. By contrast, before this abrupt (and largely unexplained) burst of architectural merriment, life 'must have been dull'. The lords, ladies and their minstrels who apparently comprised most of the population had halls which remained 'somewhat dismal', their living space cramped and inadequate, until the progress of ideas prompted a growing desire for privacy manifested in the subdivision of domestic space (Gotch 1928: 52–68). Gotch was a product of his time and culture, seeing standing remains, chiefly castles, as the evidence for his dank medieval world, and architectural change as due to enlightened architects acting in a context provided by history. But there is another agenda which seeks to discover, free from our own value judgements, the meaning that medieval buildings had for those who used them. Among the scholars who have attempted to explain architectural change in terms of more than the 'progress of ideas' include Patrick Faulkener (1958), pioneer of spatial analysis, Margaret Wood (1965), Graham Fairclough (1992), Matthew Johnson (1993, 1996), Roberta Gilchrist (1994) and Jane Grenville (1997). Many of their more challenging and influential studies have made use of the spatial analysis of interiors in order to configure medieval society and chart changes within it (e.g. Gilchrist 1990, 1994; Johnson 1993, 1996). Such methods can reveal much about the configuration of space in the social formation of power relationships, as Grenville has suggested, and it is proposed here that its more reasoned and systematic use might answer her call for ways to 'decode' the signals given out by medieval architecture as understood by contemporaries (Grenville 1997: 106, 164–5). Among these spatial approaches, one of the most informative is access analysis.

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What is access analysis?

Access analysis concerns the way that contemporary people moved about a building, which in turn reveals where they invested their social and ideological values. The relevant principles and procedures are treated in a number of general works (for example Johnson 1993; Gilchrist 1994; Grenville 1997). In brief the analysis begins with a plan of the interior of the building to be studied, and the rooms and their access are then coded according to a scheme of symbols such as that shown in Figure 2. These symbols are then composed in a diagram which summarises the associations between rooms and the routes which are possible, between them. The pattern which is created is interpreted in terms of its characteristics of relative control or freedom. The diagrams model the flow of people through the building and by implication, the social relationships that control access. Examples of the patterns produced will be seen in the case study that follows. Two forms are particularly diagnostic: the dendritic or 'tree-like' form implies that traffic is formally constructed; while the annular or 'ringy' form

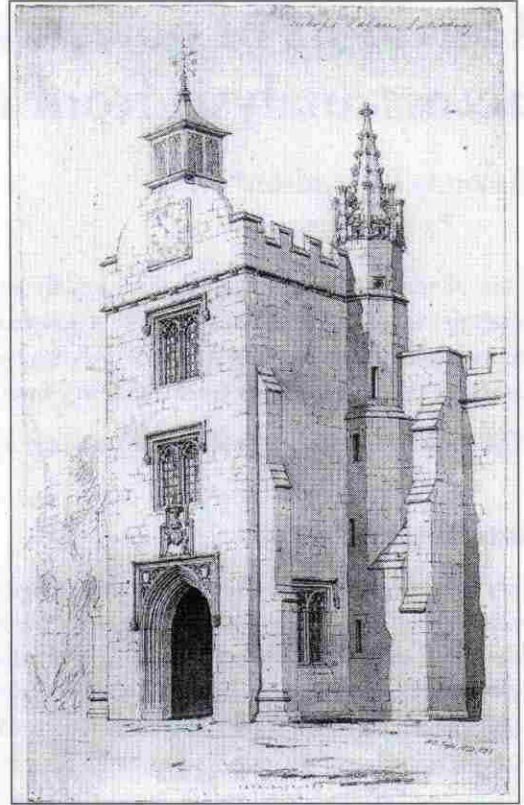


Figure 1 Porch of fifteenth century Bishop's Palace as it appeared in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Reproduced from RCHME 1993 (Plate 27) by kind permission of the British Museum (BM ScD 1933 Vol IV b.9). © Copyright British Museum

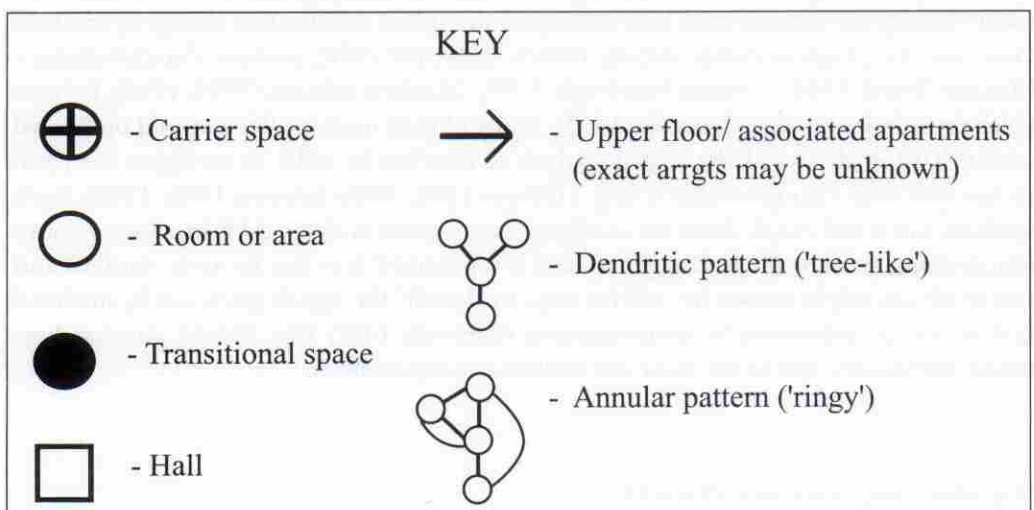


Figure 2 Key to access analysis – some commonly used codes

form suggest more freedom of movement. 'Depth' is measured by the number of steps required from the outside (the 'carrier') to the innermost room, and a 'deep' room may often be equated with something of high value or status.

Previous studies in the spatial analysis of interiors are not numerous and many are found within unpublished dissertations (e.g. Gilchrist 1990; Kitson 1997; Richardson 1998), papers in far-flung journals, or buried within wider discussions, such as Fairclough's diachronic study of Edlingham Castle, Northumberland (see Fairclough 1992). A recent example is provided by Nicola Aravecchia (2001: 31–2) who has traced the trend for a less strong demand for privacy over time in fourth–ninth century AD hermitages in Lower Egypt consistent with documentary evidence for a move toward semi-eremitism. Her diagrams might usefully be placed alongside late medieval access analyses noting opposing trends in order to make statements about the nature of the 'rise of privacy' and its links with ideology and identity.

The hierarchy of use inside a high status building of the later Middle Ages is, of course, often informed by detailed documentary evidence and it might be thought that access analysis can add little to what is already known. John Steane (2001) acknowledges the centrality of patterns of access in constructing architectures of power – 'access to the head ... was carefully controlled ... [through] a siphoning process' comprised of systems of rooms and doors (*ibid.* 11) but he warns against attempts to read them except 'in default of other [implicitly documentary] evidence' (*ibid.* 104). There is also a necessary caveat over the use of plans which may represent more than one phase. Clarendon Palace (Wiltshire), for example, has been dubbed 'a series of buildings strung together over a period of 200–300 years with no apparent rhyme or reason' (Steane 2001: 103). But the 'rhyme and reason' may have been more visible to contemporary than to modern eyes. Since there is an almost universal pattern in medieval royal palaces – first hall, then kings' apartments, with queens' apartments behind, an element of tradition is clearly present (Richardson 1998: *passim*). Moreover, no amount of documentary study would uncover certain key spatial patterns which may carry profound meaning. For example in royal palaces generally, queens' wardrobes were invariably the most permeable of their rooms and their bedchambers the deepest, while for kings this was consistently reversed (Richardson 1998: 30, 59).

Undoubtedly access analysis can founder without good documentary evidence. But as Fairclough (1992: 351) points out, the writers of medieval documents did not set out to explain to us the inner workings of their social organisation. Consequently written sources cannot be given primacy in our interpretations. Moreover, if patterns of access are employed more systematically alongside documentary and other evidence, the prospect of a perspective integrating their respective strengths while eliminating their respective weaknesses will emerge. In the end, if Faulkener's planning analysis diagrams 'altered our perception of the nature of medieval high status households' as long ago as the 1950s (Fairclough 1992: 352) it seems only reasonable to keep up the momentum.

A case study – the Cathedral Close at Salisbury, England

Salisbury was established in 1220 and quickly became the central place of medieval Wiltshire. Permission had been granted for a market in 1219 and by 1297 it had supplanted Wilton as the venue for the county's forest eyres. By the late fourteenth-century it ranked sixth among English provincial towns (Lloyd 1984: 83; Grant 1959: 434; Steane 1984: 128). Its Cathedral was served by secular canons rather than monks and the diocese was not among the richest. At £750–1500 *per annum*, income available was around £1000 less than that of York and up to £2500 below Canterbury and Winchester (Thompson 1998: 1–2).

The Cathedral Close was a large estate lying inside the town (Figure 3). Its wall, nearly 4m high, was built in 1342 at a time of increased antagonism between city and cathedral and afforded protection from its immediate, often hostile, neighbours (RCHME 1993: 8–9; Steane 2001: 202, 204). Clearly there was spatial demarcation within the town, and The

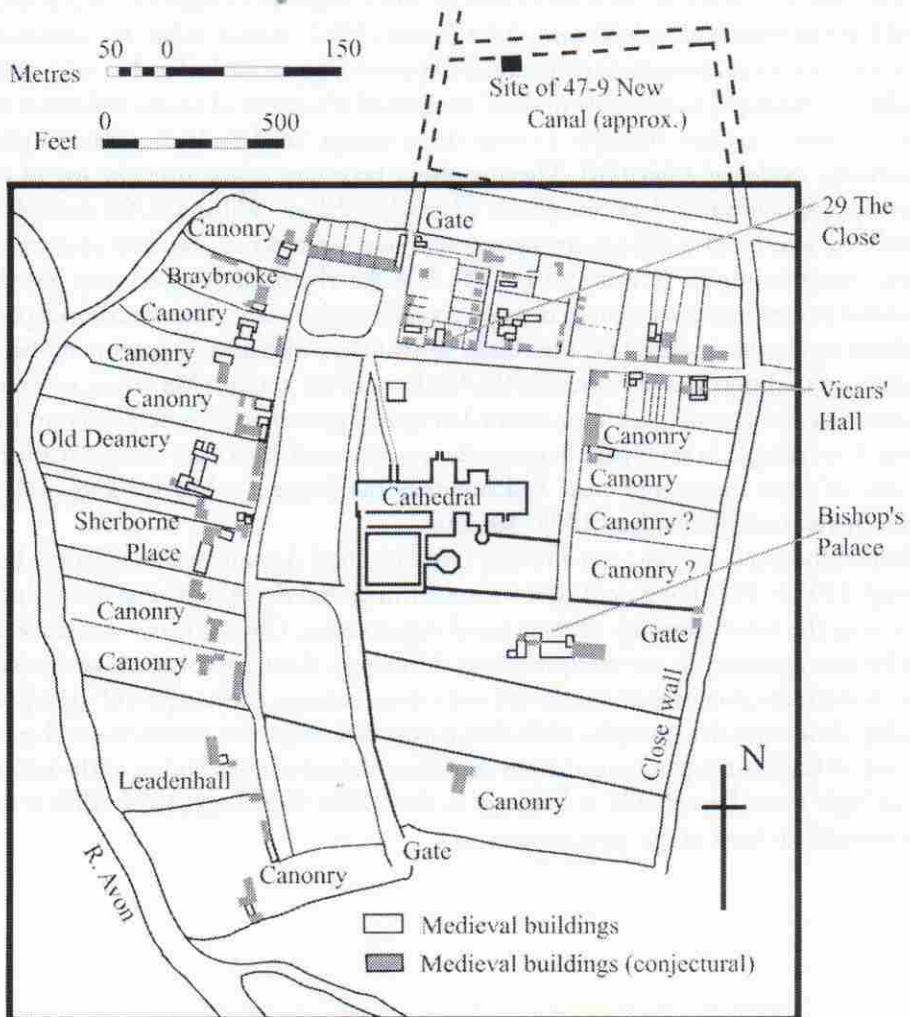


Figure 3 Plan of Salisbury Cathedral Close, after RCHME (1993).

Close has been claimed as a distant precedent for the 'garden suburbs' of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Not surprisingly in a new city planned by its bishop, The Close, containing 83 of the City's 260 acres, was generous compared to cathedral precincts in pre-existing towns (RCHME 1993: 7; Lloyd 1984, 83).

In the study which follows, buildings from three different contexts are analysed: the Bishop's Palace and 29, The Close (a Canon's house) which lay inside the Close, and 47–49 New Canal which lay outside it and within the town. The Bishop's Palace lay to the south of the cathedral and its grounds were so arranged that the Bishop had a private doorway into the cloisters, in addition to the only private entrance into The Close (RCHME 1993: 53, 54). This was common in secular closes and may reflect a desire to circumvent the jurisdiction of the dean and chapter which was the dominant authority within The Close. Thompson notes (1998: 33) that although an eastern position might sometimes be favoured, the ideal location for secular bishops (occupied here, significantly, by the Deanery and its immediate neighbours) was facing a cathedral's west end. The houses of the canons (members of the Chapter) surrounded the cathedral on its other three sides. Number 29 The Close, probably originally a minor canonry, lay in the most cramped area of the site to the north, which seems to be a continuation of the grids or 'chequers' which made up the city proper. The composition of the Close thus exhibits spatial manifestations of rank and reflects the division, despite the ideal of communal life, between wealthy clergy wishing to live in the Close and dispense hospitality and those who had not the means to do so (RCHME 1993: 8). The town house, 47–49 New Canal, which lies near the Close to the north was the residence of two successive fourteenth-century mayors (RCHME 1980: 100).

The Bishop's palace

The Bishop's Palace was built originally in 1225 probably under the Salisbury canon Elias de Dereham, who also oversaw the extensive building works at nearby Clarendon Palace (RCHME 1993: 60), and extended by Bishop Beauchamp in the fifteenth-century. Access analysis has been undertaken for both the thirteenth and the fifteenth-century phases, and comparisons are drawn between them. The thirteenth-century hall (Figure 4) offered an ease of access concomitant with the hospitality traditionally inherent in the Bishop's office. Key spatial and social divisions are revealed in two distinct branches, one leading to the Bishop's apartments, the other to more public areas. This dendritic pattern denotes control of movement through space and a relatively hierarchical society. There is no 'ringiness' denoting multiple points of access and associated with a perceived need to 'hide' servants.

The possession of a parlour at such an early date – documentary references to London 'parlours' begin in the mid-fourteenth-century (Schofield 1994: 66) – denotes a shift away from the hall, already losing its centralising functions. Buried deep within the complex, as it invariably was, the parlour may reveal a nascent desire for privacy evident also in contemporary royal palaces (Schofield 1994: 67; Richardson 1998: 18, 21–2). Like the king, bishops had large households and were expected to give hospitality to the highest personages – 36 canons and two Archbishops were entertained on the premises for a week in 1225 alone (RCHME 1993: 7).

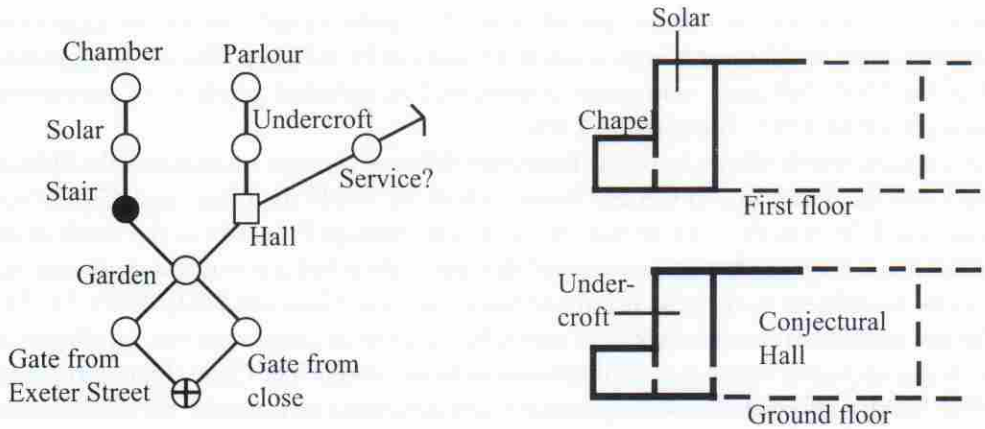


Figure 4 The Bishop's Palace in the thirteenth century: plan (after RCHME 1993) and access analysis

More detailed interpretation is limited by our ability to identify the rooms. Before the sixteenth-century it is hard to discern any fixed vocabulary relating to room function, especially of those most private (Grenville 1997: 9–10). Here, though, the 'parlour' is one of the most private areas and we might expect the higher echelons – kings, queens and bishops – to require a degree of seclusion even in the thirteenth-century. However, although parlours were invariably located furthest from the street in terms of access (Schofield 1994: 93) how far this actually denotes a desire for privacy rather than merely reflecting the concept's centrality to modern concerns is debatable. Privacy in the modern, absolute sense – a development of the seventeenth-century onwards – seems anyway to have been low in people's needs throughout the Middle Ages (Woolgar 1999: 197; Grenville 1997: 107; Quiney 1990: 93). Thompson's recent reading of the solar as the original hall further complicates the picture (1998: 53–4). Nevertheless, it is evident from Henry III's donations and the involvement of the Clarendon Palace architects that many of the early buildings in The Close did draw from Royal architecture.

The diagram of the fifteenth-century Bishops' Palace (Figure 5) reveals a very slight increase in ringiness and perhaps this less formal pattern is a feature of the highest status ecclesiastical residences. The placing of the hall in relation to the Bishop's private apartments has altered: visitors would have had to pass *through* the hall in order to reach them. In this way it maintains the centralising properties noted by Johnson (1993: 56) within a building increasingly segregated along lines of rank. The parlour, now part of an axis, is no longer the isolated area it was, perhaps prompting a need for additional private rooms. Bishop Beauchamp, who built the fifteenth-century palace, was a member of the Order of the Garter and it is likely that late medieval chivalry was a major factor in the heightened ceremonial function of higher-status late medieval halls (Steane 1984: 196). This is evidenced also by the monumentally proportioned tower-porch (Figure 1) built onto the Bishop's Hall, which would have informed the perceptions of visitors on entering, and simultaneously placed the building one step back from the carrier in terms of access.

The idea of a long decline of the hall through the later Middle Ages has recently been challenged and at around 88 x 38 feet, Bishop Beauchamp's was among the largest halls ever built (RCHME 1993: 54). Evidence indicates that formal feasting remained a significant

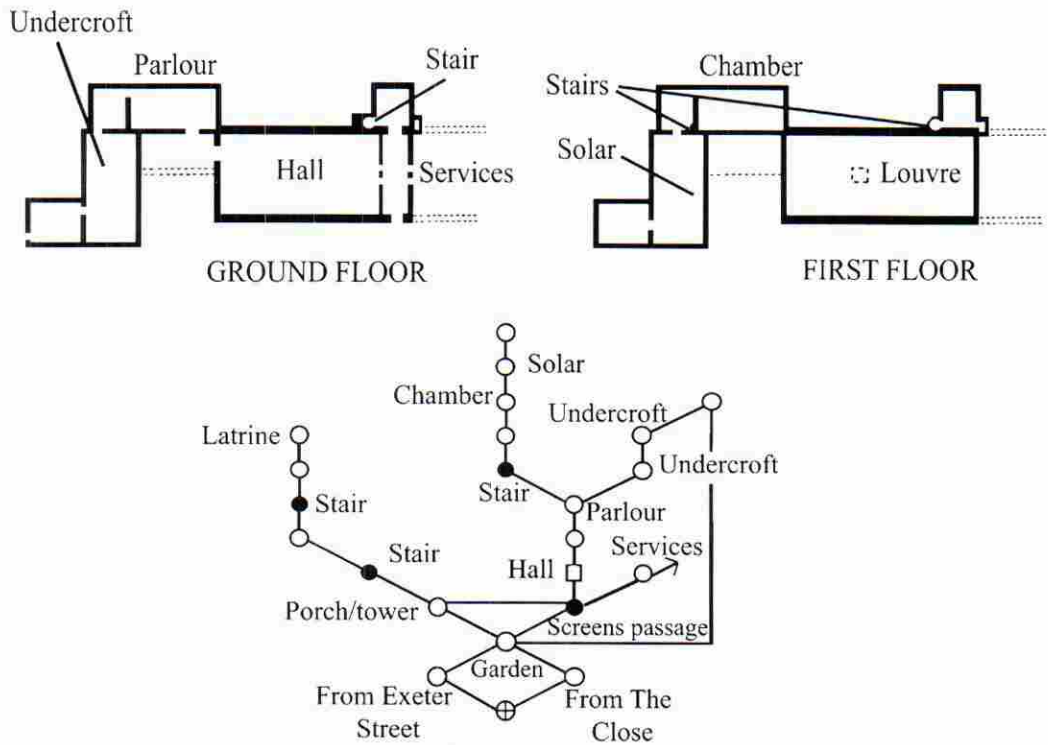


Figure 5 The Bishop's Palace in the fifteenth-century: plan (after RCHME 1993) and access analysis

part of late medieval etiquette and even in the sixteenth-century new halls were built on a scale grander than ever. As Grenville (1997: 106–7) has noted, 'it remains to future researchers to generate the 'interactive route planners' that detailed spatial studies could provide', and it may be that patterns of access, divorced from aesthetic and literary evidence, can add further layers to our understanding of its sudden demise at this time. It must be significant that Henry VIII's hall at Hampton Court, the 'last major royal statement of [the hall's] importance', was bypassed entirely by the ceremonial route to the king's chambers (Grenville 1997: 114; Thurley 1993: 114).

A pattern that certainly develops through the later Middle Ages is the ceremonial route to principal chambers – termed by Fairclough the 'axis of honour'. At Salisbury, the siting of the fifteenth-century hall has transformed the route to the bishop's apartments into such an axis, a tree-like route through a succession of rooms intended to filter out all but those of the highest rank associated almost exclusively with regulation of access according to male status (Fairclough 1992: 355; Gilchrist 1999: 122). Axes of honour are a prime example of the way in which architecture reflects social change (compare the earlier Bishop's Palace), while reinforcing the status and identity of different groups. This was seclusion as a mark of status rather than of modesty (Woolgar 1999: 50). The rank of those allowed to proceed along the axis to the bishop's private quarters was enhanced, whilst his pre-eminence in both Episcopal and noble society was emphasised.

A Canon's house: 29, The Close

Number 29 The Close, a very different building to the palace, also experienced a change of plan in the fifteenth-century. In the fourteenth-century it was entered through its screens passage, where the traffic was sorted; the route led to the great chamber with two rings encompassing the kitchen and pantry on the one hand and the hall study and oratory on the other (Figure 6A). In access analysis terms, the house is eight steps deep, reflecting perhaps the number of occupants, its status as a non-familial, single-sex establishment and the requirements of privacy relating to areas like the study/oratory. This latter is the deepest area of the house via both the 'public route' and the service area, suggesting that only the canons or privileged guests would have used the entrance from the hall to gain access to the oratory. The house has a large number of transitional spaces which can function as mechanisms of privacy as well as access. Aravecchia notes an increase in vestibules and doors used to facilitate increased seclusion in hermitages, as does Thurley in his discussion of the gallery and closet plan in Tudor palaces (Aravecchia 2001: 30, 32; Thurley 1993: 125–7).

In the fifteenth-century (Figure 6B) rooms were gained by inserting a floor in the open hall, and transforming the old, standard buttery and pantry into a parlour (RCHME 1993: 139).

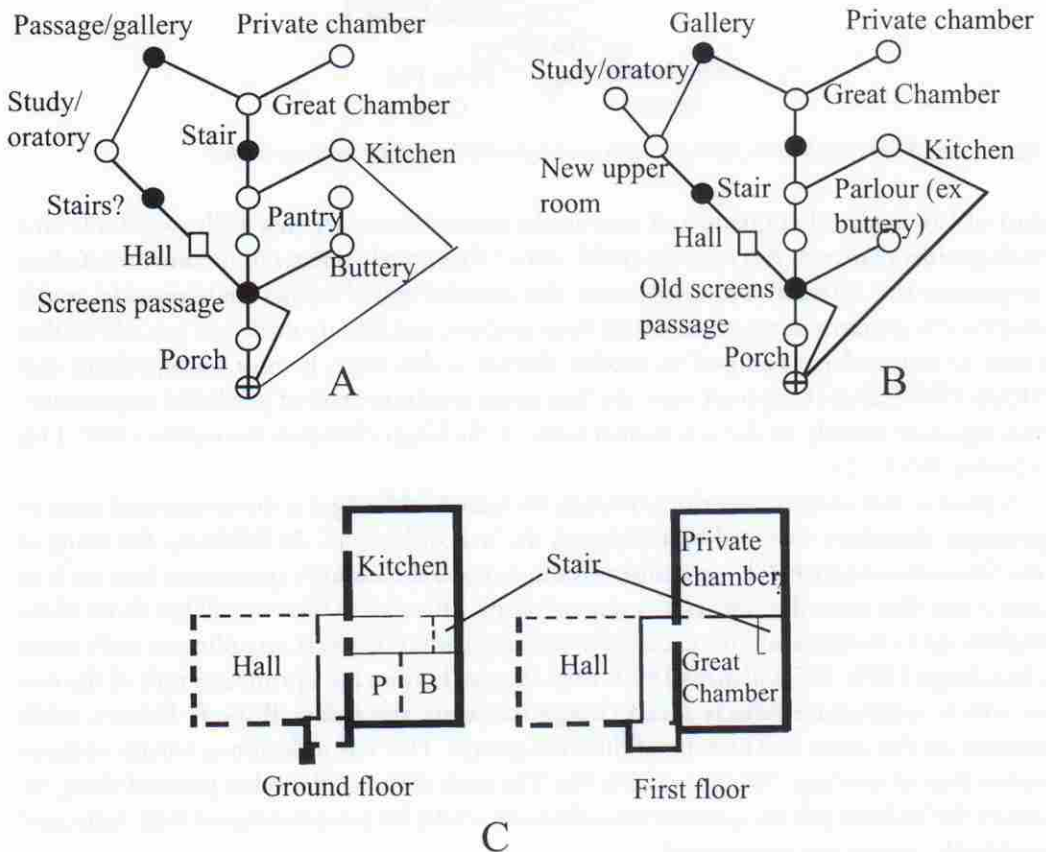


Figure 6 A Canon's house: Access analysis of 29, The Close in (A) fourteenth-century (B) fifteenth-century and (C) fourteenth-century plan.

Unusually, the parlour is far from the deepest area, although significantly the service rooms have been considered dispensable enough to make way for it. Perhaps improved cooking facilities in the kitchens had deprived the old hall and service of their centralising functions. Johnson (1993: 137) has suggested that increased distinction between service and domestic areas describes the breakdown of the day-to-day interdependence of the patriarchal community, both heralding and reflecting a conceptual division between servants and those served. However, here the abandonment of the service and relative permeability of the parlour might equally have resulted from spatial constraints. Either way, the transformational grammar of number 29 (thus also its arguably monumental social catalysts) are at best poorly reflected by the diagrams, whose routes of access have been little affected. But this in itself may be significant. Johnson (1993: 139) notes that deviance from standard medieval plans at first made little difference to patterns of access and Quiney (1990: 93) has pointed out that changes in spatial organisation during the fifteenth-century played havoc with any 'gain' to privacy.

A town house: 47–49 New Canal

47–9 New Canal lies in the city proper (Figure 7) and its diagram is more shallow and ringy. It is only five steps deep from the carrier – consistent with Schofield's assertion (1993: 93) that the houses of prosperous merchants were often arranged to exhibit an emphasis on trade

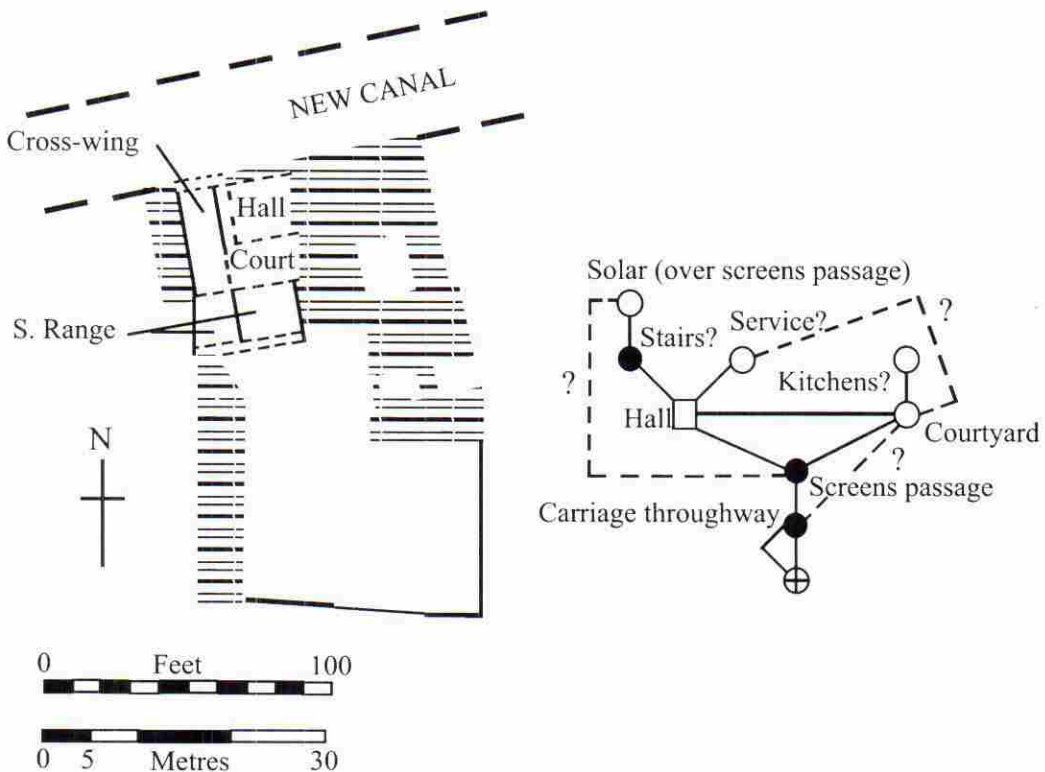


Figure 7 A town house: Plan (after RCHME 1980) and access analysis of 47–49 New Canal

and the street. As in 29 The Close, the hall is three architectural steps deep, although at New Canal this is due to the placing of the carriage through-way below the cross-wing, perhaps a necessity in the more cramped city outside the Close.

Schofield (1994: 34, 60) has noted the courtyard as a characteristic of affluent ecclesiastics and the merchant community in London. The New Canal house's courtyard may reflect a *habitus* shared throughout commercial society. Although courtyard houses are less common in English urban settings than in mainland Europe, many Salisbury merchants – like those in London – lived in courtyard houses, their halls comparable in size with the grander canonries in the Close (RCHME 1993: xlv). And in nearby Winchester, both the early fourteenth-century house of John de Tytynge, a wealthy wool-merchant, and the fifteenth-century dwelling of John Newman, a less affluent fuller, were designed to courtyard plans (Morris *et al* 1988: 102–04). Fullers' implements, considered a nuisance, were ordered to be removed from the streets in thirteenth-century London (Schofield 1994: 87), and it is not inconceivable that the need to withdraw industrial equipment from frontage areas led to the emphasis on courtyards in commercial complexes.

Conclusion

The diagram of the thirteenth-century Bishop's Palace is dissimilar to contemporary royal residences but certain features *were* shared. By the fifteenth century it had much more in common with royal and seigneurial counterparts, including its axes of honour, the siting of its hall and the slight increase in ringiness, reflecting the social pre-eminence of the Bishop and perhaps changed attitudes to servants respectively. An increase in private space was also observed in 29 The Close. The house on New Canal was comparatively 'shallow', reflecting different social and commercial requirements as regards privacy, but also dimensional constraints and identification with the street frontage. New Canal's courtyard perhaps reflects a shared social identity within commercial society, while its lack in number 29 may have represented social demarcation within the religious community – in the wider world as well as within its more immediate topographical setting. Such observations can be noted adequately without diagrams, but the access patterns can highlight them at a glance.

Overwhelmingly, the access diagrams of the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century palaces, Episcopal and royal, appear to show the architectural manifestation of a hegemonic masculinity – or at least an aspiration to values shared throughout seigneurial society – consistent with Thompson's findings. Although later medieval bishops' residences exhibited more internal divisions than those of noblemen, they generally tended to follow the same pattern, for example in the multiplication of rooms which induced, in tandem, a heightened emphasis on social distance within more compact environments (Thompson 1998: 157; Woolgar 1999: 197).

The rarely articulated issue of decline in itinerancy as a motivation for late fourteenth-century domestic and social developments (Woolgar 1999 is an exception) cannot entirely stand up in the case of cathedral palaces. Although Episcopal itinerancy declined, bishops necessarily continued to tour their sees and where their households did become more rooted, it was at their rural manor houses. Instead, an aspiration to shared identity with noble society appears to have been the overriding factor. This merits further study, putting emphasis on the place of architecture in the formation of identities. The 'trickle down' theory is too

simplistic where influences appear more horizontal than vertical.

A final comment from beyond Salisbury may help to set an agenda for the future. York's Vicars Choral held an estate of considerable size in that city, and one of their holdings, Cam Hall, has been the subject of valuable interdisciplinary research. Grenville has expressed hopes that the use of access analysis may lead to recognition of a 'vicars choral house style' which would have been read and understood by contemporaries (Grenville 1997: 164–5). Such sentiments lie behind the present brief review, which so far has only presented, in Grenville's words, a 'bland tourist map' (above). Nevertheless, we have already been able to draw conclusions which do not depend on knowledge of architectural embellishment and thus will have application in those many archaeological situations where only foundations survive. Access analysis of buildings in the Salisbury Close has hinted at greater understanding of the way various identities are reflected in architectural space. Its potential for measuring hidden social properties in buildings should encourage its employment in late medieval archaeological and architectural literature.

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