



Report of the Château Gaillard XXIX Colloque - Château Thierry



The extraordinary Fère-en-Tardenois castle, from the south, now in the grounds of a hotel. Drone image © Leif Plith Lauritsen.

**The Château Gaillard XXIX Colloque:
Brie for Breakfast and
Champagne for Lunch**

Gillian Scott

I settled upon the title for this review during the conference, over breakfast one morning in conversation with Bill Woodburn. It seemed a suitable summary of the experiences we had enjoyed over the preceding few days; and continued to enjoy for a few more. What else could we expect from a conference set in the Champagne region of France and organised by François Blary and Anne-Marie Flambard Héricher? Well, the answer to that would be a spectacular selection of castles and an equally exciting range of papers.

It was the twenty-ninth biennial colloque of Château Gaillard in Château Thierry from 26th-31st August 2018, and as the above passage suggests, the event was a roaring success. There were 78 delegates, from Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland, the UK and the USA. The UK was represented by Penny Dransart, Gillian Scott, Chris Jones-Jenkins, John Kenyon, Kare McManama-Kearin, Rob Liddiard, Pamela Marshall, Richard Oram, Peter Purton, Rachel Swallow, Therron Welstead and Bill Woodburn. Ireland was represented by Brian Hodkinson, Daniel Curley, Frank Hall, David Sweetman, Roseanne Meenan, Ben Murtagh, Eamonn





Report of the Château Gaillard XXIX Colloque- Château Thierry

O'Donoghue, Dan Tietzsch-Tyler, Karen Dempsey and Tom Finan.

The theme of the colloque was 'Living in Castles' and given the diverse range of topics that could be covered under this umbrella, all papers managed to broadly follow the theme. The days were divided into thematic sessions, looking at 'the spatial organisation of the castle', 'the social organisation of the castle', 'what do the texts teach us?' and 'everyday life at the castle'. The papers were presented, as usual, in three languages (English, French and German) and they will be published in time for the next colloque, which will be in Austria (Salzburg) in 2020. This report will summarise the contents of those given by UK and Ireland delegates.

John Kenyon discussed the historical development of Middleham Castle, beginning with the peculiarity of the earliest enclosure around the great tower which John argues must have been in timber. The paper ended with a discussion of the views over the lordly landscape from the great tower, which included gardens, orchard and ponds, with the tower's principal rooms sited to take fullest advantage.

Pamela Marshall looked at architectural pointers for social distinction. Beginning with Loches (1013-35), where the higher you go in the building the better the room, and ending at Tattershall (1433-43), where she argues for an inner and outer hall with elite access to the tower being via a first floor chamber at one end of the outer hall, leading to the first-floor tower hall and from there up to progressively private chambers. This she argued demonstrates similar social norms across the period.

Richard Oram presented Borthwick Castle and how it integrates service, public and 'private' areas within its tightly-bound U-

shaped form. With a clever arrangement of staircases, lobbies and differently appointed rooms, Richard traced how the service community within the towers were both separated and connected to Lord Borthwick.

Therron Welstead presented evidence of castles with multiple chapels and argued that conspicuous piety formed part of the symbolic life of castle-occupants in the same way as symbolic defence and conspicuous consumption have now been accepted as ubiquitous features of castle life. He argues for outer, more public, chapels and inner, more private, chapels, but states that even within the latter examples, furnishing, partitions, squints etc. would be used to enhance privacy, but at the same time reinforce social hierarchy.

Tom Finan presented a synthesis of developments in the study of Gaelic castles twenty years on from the publication of Kieran O'Connor's *The Archaeology of Medieval Rural Settlement in Ireland*. His paper summarised the issues of lack of evidence and problems of interpretation, but also highlighted how recently excavated evidence points to a particular form of Gaelic elite landscape that has similarities with castle forms, but that push the boundary of what can be interpreted as a castle.

Karen Dempsey took a feminist perspective on castle studies, calling for a more inclusive narrative. Viewing gardens as female spaces, she tried to locate the gardens at Adare and Lea. The spaces she identified had similar spatial qualities; both were in the inner bailey/ward, in the shadow of the tower, with the potential for other additional enclosing features in timber. Interestingly, at Lea she cited ecological evidence for the presence nowadays of imported plants at the site, suggesting they may have their origin in the medieval garden.





Report of the Château Gaillard XXIX Colloque - Château Thierry

Posters from the UK were presented by Chris Jones-Jenkins on the reconstruction of Holt Castle, Rob Liddiard on Chivalry, Castles and Landscapes, Rachel Swallow on Gender, Space and Place at Caernarfon Castle, and Kare McManama-Kearin on Comfort in Castles, asking whether tower-house window placement could be related to passive-solar heating.

Of the site visits, our first was to the local castle, Château Thierry. A sprawling site, dating from the 9th century but now enclosed by a curtain wall with towers of 1222-1226, by Thibault IV. Further towers and the Saint-Jean Gate date to a late 13th century remodelling of the site. All interior buildings have been lost, but excavations by François Blary have revealed the remains of impressively-large kitchen hearths laid with brick.

Tuesday was an all-day excursion heading north to take in Armentières-sur-Ourcq, Droizy, Septmonts, Coucy-le-Château and Oulchy-le-Château. Armentières-sur-Ourcq is a fortified residence of c.1225-1275 with later remodelling into a bourgeois residence. The first phase comprised a long rectangular building with four corner towers, with a courtyard to one side containing a D-shaped tower at one corner. The whole was within a trapezoidal outer bailey. It was remodelled in the second half of the 15th century, including the rebuilding of the courtyard and the addition of a gatehouse. Further renovation in the 16th century included rebuilding the D-shaped tower with the provision of gunloops.

At Droizy the current structure has been dated by Mesqui to the late-14th century on the strength of it having a latrine turret to one side. Some discussion on site hinged upon whether this feature was, in fact, an addition to a tower of much earlier date. Apart from the tower there are also some remains of other building ranges, and a 16th-century lodging range.

The earliest structure at Septmonts, the favourite residence of the Bishops of Soissons, appears to be a square residential building known as the Saint-Louis room, which was originally a four-storey tower of the 13th century. This was accompanied by a 13th-century curtain wall. The whole castle was reorganised and enlarged in the second half of the 14th century, when vast ramparts were added to enclose an irregular trapezoid area divided into two courtyards. One of these contains the remarkable tower attributed to Bishop de Bucy, between 1360 and 1370. The tower has features that suggest it was designed in part by royal architects, but that it used local craftsmanship. The building is certainly unique and it is considered to be a masterpiece of French medieval Baroque.

The enormous castle at Coucy-le-Château was built by Enguerrand III in the first half of the 13th century. It is located on a raised spur of land enclosed by curtain walls and divided into three sectors, containing the village to the east, the inner court in the middle and the castle proper to the west. The inner court was large enough to contain a small medieval town and contained a 12th-century chapel. The castle proper is larger than most important royal castles of the same date. It has four circular towers of varying diameters, between 17.5m and 20m, located along a trapezoidal enclosure. Within the enclosure stood a huge circular keep of 31m in diameter, now destroyed, but described extensively by Viollet-le-Duc, with three levels of vaulted ceilings. A large hall, chapel, and lodgings occupied the interior faces of the curtain wall.

Not much remains of the castle at Oulchy-le-Château, which appears to have been similar in form to Château Thierry. The focus of the visit was instead the Collegiate Church on the castle plateau which has a stunning series of carved capitals showing geometric and styl-





Report of the Château Gaillard XXIX Colloque - Château Thierry

ised motifs. These, and the steeple on the south side of the building, date to the 11th century, whilst the choir and transepts belong to the end of the 12th century.

On Wednesday afternoon we headed north-east to visit the castles of Saponay, Fère-en-Tardenois and Nesle-en-Dôle. Saponay is a small site with not much remaining of its circular tower, but it is remarkable for the machicolated façade of a building adjacent to the tower, that is thought to date to sometime after 1360. This rare façade has pointed-arched buttresses with openings at the apex all along its length.

Fère-en-Tardenois is a castle you have to see to believe. Situated on an enormous, semi-artificial, oval-shaped motte, this irregular heptagonal castle with flanking towers dates to the first decade of the 13th century by Robert II Count of Dreux. The entrance to the north-east is between two rectangular towers with pointed spurs. The bases of the circular towers display a 'cogwheel' decorative design unique in France and each had two floor levels. In the 15th century an outer enclosure was added to the top of the motte possibly for use by artillery and then the whole site was redeveloped in the late 16th century into a Renaissance palace. This included the addition of the striking bridge across to the motte top that included a gallery and living accommodation.

Nesles-en-Dôle was constructed by the Count of Dreux Robert III in 1226, after Fère-en-Tardenois had been lost to his brother Pierre Mauclerc. It comprised an inner castle ward enclosed by a curtain wall containing circular corner and mural towers surround by a moat, with a detached solitary tower surrounded by a moat to its north-east side. The latter tower was accessed via a bridge across the moat from the inner ward and it was remarkably solid. It contains a well and three floor levels, two of which are



Nesles-en-Dôle. The detached three storey solitary tower surrounded by a moat to its north-east side. Built c. 1226. © G. Scott.

vaulted and lit by a single window. There was a single latrine at the third level. No medieval buildings survive within the inner ward, but a 16th century brick-built lodging is present along the west wall.

The conference dinner took place at the Caves Pannier, where we were given a tour of the caves used to store Champagne, some of which originated as medieval quarries. The tour ended in the cellar where we had ample opportunity to sample the merchandise whilst being entertaining by a four-piece band and offered copious canapés. A fabulous evening to celebrate another successful Château Gaillard colloque.

Those who partook in the post-conference excursion travelled north-west to the impressive west façade of the castle of Ferté-Milon and the Viollet-le-Duc masterpiece at Pierrefonds, followed by a full-day excursion southward to the walled town and castle of Provins World Heritage Site.

