Containing Wallingford Castle, 1146–1153

By MARK SPURRELL

SUMMARY

Siege or counter-castles constructed against Wallingford Castle during Stephen's reign are newly suggested for sites at South Moreton and Cholsey, besides those already recognized at Crowmarsh and Brightwell. Counter-castles can be classified according to their primary tactical function as those constructed for use by assailants in a short-term siege, those left behind by the main force for a small force to conduct a long siege, and those sited to contain or neutralize an enemy castle without thought of its capture. The castles on the west side of the Thames at Wallingford were designed primarily to defend the lands of Stephen's allies.

In 1138 Robert, Earl of Gloucester, defied King Stephen and espoused the cause of his half-sister Matilda who claimed the throne under the will of King Henry I. Bristol Castle, which was Robert's main stronghold, was ordered to be put in a state of readiness along with other of his castles, including Wallingford.[1] Wallingford Castle was besieged three times in the wars between King Stephen and the Angevins, in 1139–40, 1146 and 1152–3. In this paper the physical remains and role of the siege or counter-castles built and used in connection with these sieges will be discussed with special attention to those in use during the period 1146–1153.[2]

THE COUNTER-CASTLES AROUND WALLINGFORD

1. Crowmarsh

(Sites and Monuments No. 2010; O.S. Grid Reference, SU 614895)

Nothing now remains of this fortification, which was constructed in 1142 and was by far the most important of the counter-castles round Wallingford. There used to be a feature known as Stephen's Mount, which lay to the north of the road and to the west of the church, but the whole site was levelled for industrial purposes, and is now covered with houses.

---

[1] *Annales monasterii de Wintona* in H.R. Luard (ed.), *Annales Monastici* (Rolls Series, 36, II, 1865), 51.

[2] For a summary of siege-castles around Wallingford see E.A.C. King, *Castellarium Anglicanum – An Index and Bibliography of the Castles of England, Wales and the Islands* (1988), 566–7. For an account of the sieges of Wallingford Castle see C.F. Slade, 'Wallingford Castle in the Reign of King Stephen', *Berks. Arch Jnl.* 58 (1960), 33–43.

It resisted considerable assaults by the Angevin forces in 1153, and was described as being 'very strong', although constructed of wood, a 'work of wondrous toil and skill'.[3]

Its purpose was described by Gervase of Canterbury as preventing sorties and raids from Wallingford Castle. In the relief of Wallingford by Henry in 1153 it was itself invested – 'an arduous and unexpected business' – surrounded by a 'very great rampart' which hemmed in the king's army and castle.[4]

2. Brightwell

(Sites and Monuments No. 2948; O.S. Grid Reference, SU 578907)

The castle[5] was sited to the south of the village, at the northern edge of the low-lying, marshy ground between Brightwell and Mackney. The moat still exists on the west and south sides of the site. To the north, part of it survived at the end of the 18th century, and is illustrated in a view of the Rectory Garden. The eastern side probably followed the line of the existing stream. A small mound is to be seen in the south-west corner of the enclosure. It may be a guard-point mound dating from a later period unless it is a post-medieval garden ornament.[6] King thinks this mound unlikely to have been the site of the siege-castle, and apparently rejects the moat as its site too.[7]

Within the enclosure of 2.5 ha., or 6 acres, stands the present parish church. It is dedicated to St. Agatha, a relic of whom was presented or restored to Winchester Cathedral Priory by Henry of Blois.[8] If, as seems probable, this was a new acquisition, it is likely to have been brought to England by Bishop Henry on his return from Rome in 1152.[9]

Both Brightwell and South Moreton have been noted as castles, but in respect of their

[3] Gervase, *Opera historica*, ed. W. Stubbs (Rolls Series, 73.1, 1879), 129; Slade, 'Wallingford Castle', 38; King, *Castellarium*, 387. It was described in the *Gesta Stephani* (see below), 185/6, as *erecto in prospectu Walengefordiae miri sudoris et artificii castello*; and by Henry of Huntingdon (*History of the English*, ed. T. Arnold (Rolls Ser. 74, 1879), 279) as *castellum inexpugnabile*. *Gesta Stephani* has been printed three times in England, once in the Rolls Series (vol. 82.3 (1886), ed. B. Howlett); again by K.R. Potter, *Gesta Stephani, the Deeds of Stephen* (London, 1955), which is the edn. quoted by King and by Slade; finally ed. and trans. K.R. Potter with new introduction by R.H.C. Davies, *Gesta Stephani* (Oxford, 1975). This last edn. includes the previously lost ending to the work taking the history down to 1153. This is the edn. quoted in this article as *Gesta Stephani*; a double reference is given for the Latin and the English.

[4] Gervase, *Opera Historica*, 129–30, 153.

[5] King, *Castellarium*, 13.

[6] For guard-point mounds see *Surrey Archaeol. Collection*, 53 (1953), xxvii–xxviii, noting an excavation at Tadworth of a late 12th-cent. manor with two guard-point mounds. D.F. Renn, 'Mottes – a classification', *Antiquity*, 33 (1959), 106–112, at p. 111 describes these features as 'tiny mottes on manorial sites'. The Brightwell mound has had, in recent years, extra earth heaped against its landward side: inf. from Dr. Pauline Emerson. King (*Castellarium*, p. 13) says of Brightwell Castle, 'The mound at SU 578908 is unlikely to be its site'.

[7] King, *Castellarium*, 13.

[8] The list of Henry of Blois' benefactions to Winchester Cathedral Priory is printed in E. Bishop, *Liturgica Historica* (1918), 401, note 7.

[9] The church was almost certainly built at this time as a garrison church, there being perhaps another two churches in the parish, one of them at Mackney. For the charter evidence see P.H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters, an Annotated List and Bibliography* (1968), No. 517. See also J.E. Field, 'The Saxon Charters of Brightwell, Sotwell and Mackney, Berks', *Berks., Bucks., and Oxon. Arch. Jnl*, xi (1905), 108–12; xii (1906), 7–12, 49–52, 82–86. The authenticity of these charters is so doubtful that it is not possible to date the situation to which they claim to refer. For a church at Mackney, see G. Pike, 'A Medieval Cemetery at Mackney Court Farm, Brightwell-cum-Sotwell', *Berks., Bucks., and Oxon. Arch. Jnl.* (1963), pp. 40–7.

Fig. 1. Brightwell: the moat survives on the S and W, is
represented by a stream to the E, and on the N a shallow
depression marks its course through gardens N of the
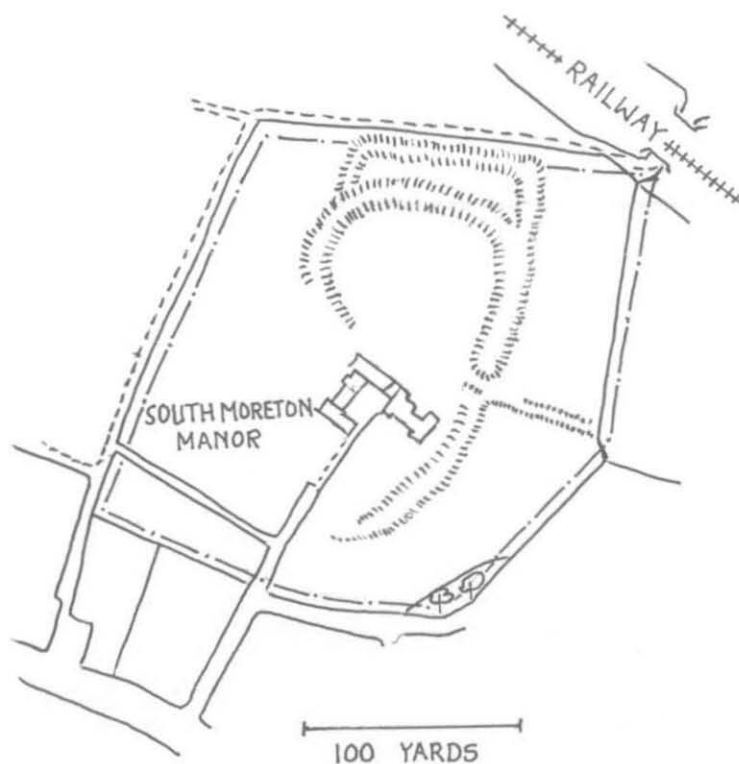churchyard boundary.

Fig. 2. South Moreton: the moat proably lay within the fences except on the E.
(Fencing of the wood in the SE corner is a recent boundary alteration.)

mounds rather than their moats. For instance, 'one of the *mottes* beside their respective parish churches may be the castle built in 1145–6 within sight of Wallingford by the Earl of Chester . . .'.[10] Perhaps Renn thought that straight-sided water defences were always later than the Norman period. Although the typical Norman castle may seem to be one like Pleshey with its great curved dry ditches, yet straight wet defences are by no means unknown. They can be found for example at Weeting (Norfolk), Odiham (Hants) and Eardisley (Herefordshire). A close parallel can be found in the plan of the castle at Rampton (Cambridgeshire),[11] built probably in 1143 as part of a network of castles to contain Geoffrey de Mandeville at Ramsey Abbey.

3. South Moreton

(Sites and Monuments No. 2700; O.S. Grid Reference, SU 562884)

This castle[12] is not mentioned in any of the written sources, but a study of the map reveals an enclosure similar in shape and size (2.75 ha., nearly 7 acres) to that at Brightwell. The site encloses a manor house, parts of which may date back to the late 13th century.[13]

The house is surrounded by a well preserved moat of unusual shape. Beyond this moat are the fences, the plan of which suggests that they may well mark the site of an older, larger moat. Part of the northern section of this enclosure is described in the Sites and Monuments survey as follows: 'To the north of the moat, but connected to it, is another dry ditch, the purpose of which is obscure but which may have been a fish pond.' This ditch is about seven yards wide. It is here suggested that this is the remaining section of the 12th-century moat. On the east side of the enclosure, there remains a bank which may be the inner edge of the moat. To the south and west the ground has been much disturbed by gravel workings. There are three ditches connecting the two moats. One has been described as a hollow way. The other two link the northern fragment of 'moat' to the new moat, not as deep as the old 'moat'. This difference is not noted on the O.S. map.

4. Cholsey

(Sites and Monuments No. 2717; O.S. Grid Reference, SU 585868)

The castle[14] here is represented by a fragment of the moat at its north-west corner, partly destroyed by the building of the railway in the 19th century. It lies to the south of the road from the village to the church, and to the south-east of the church.

[10] D.F. Renn, *Norman Castles in Britain* (1968, 2nd edn. 1973), 481. The castle referred to here is normally identified as Crowmarsh Castle.

[11] A.E. Brown and C.E. Taylor, 'Cambridgeshire Earthwork Surveys II', *Proceedings of the Cambridgeshire Antiquarian Society*, lxvii (1977), 85–102 (Rampton, pp. 97–9).

[12] There is another fortification at South Moreton, consisting of a damaged motte or mound at SU 559880 (Sites and Monuments No. 2698). This mound is noticed by King, *Castellarium*, 11. It is, of course, possible that this mound had a part in the sieges of Wallingford, but it does not seem to be of the same series as the others discussed in this paper, which are remarkably similar to each other.

[13] Information from Mrs Arams, 24 Sept. 1993.
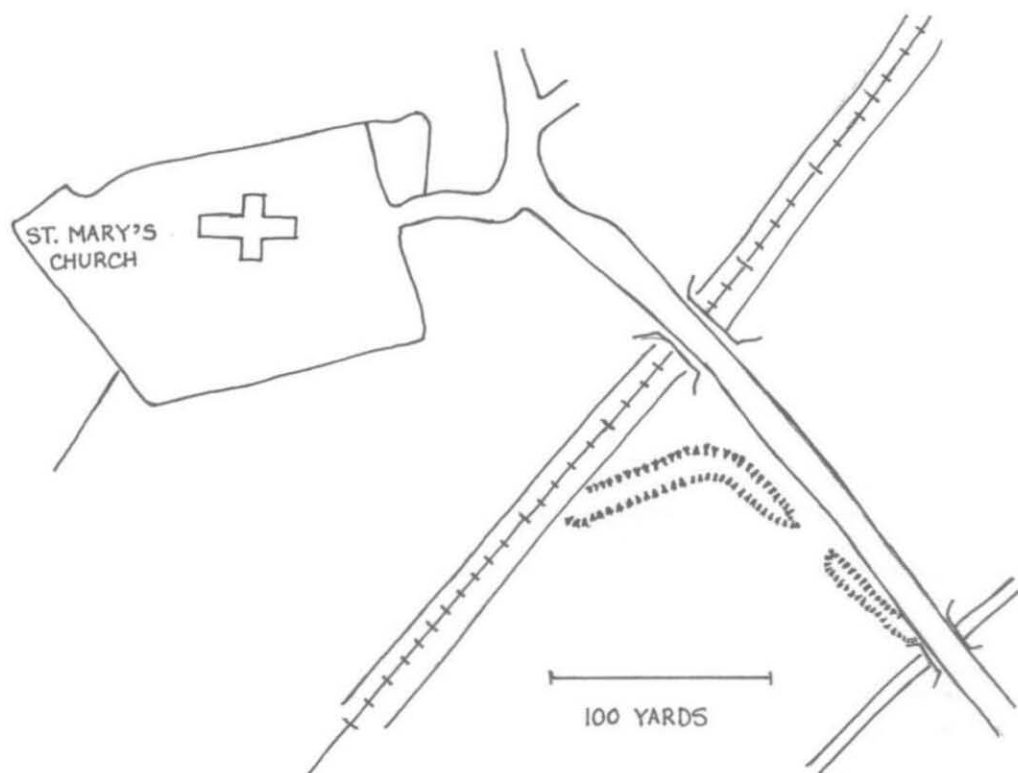
[14] Not noticed by King in his *Castellarium*.

Fig. 3.   Cholsey. Only the NE corner survives. The abbey barn lay N of the church.

5. Reading

(Berkshire Sites and Monuments Record, No. 2113.08000; O.S. Grid Reference, SU 719736)

Reading Castle is usually identified with the motte, known as Forbury Hill, close to the abbey ruins.[15] As will be discussed below, it is possible that this castle is referred to by mistake for Cholsey. The sole authority for connecting the castle with the siege of Wallingford is Robert of Torigni. He records for the year 1153:[16]

Soluta est itaque obsidio quae circa Walingefort ordinata fuerat, rege Stephano Cravemense subvertente. Nam anno praeterito familia ducis Henrici, quae Walingefort incolebat, non solum castrum Bretewelle, quod diu eos impugnaverat, verum etiam castellum, quod rex Stephanus contra ius et fas erexerat apud abbatiam Radingis, pessum-dederat.

'Thus the siege of Wallingford, which had been ordered by King Stephen,[17] was raised by the fall of

[15] King, *Castellarium*, 11.

[16] *Chronica Roberti de Torigneio* (Torigni) in R. Howlett (ed.), *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II, and Richard I* (Rolls Ser. 82.4, 1889), 174.

[17] Moving the comma from after *fuerat* to after *Stephano*.

Crowmarsh. For the previous year Duke Henry's garrison, which occupied Wallingford, had destroyed not only Brightwell Castle, which for a long time had been besieging them, but also the castle which King Stephen, against all right and morality, had built at Reading Abbey.'

It seems a problem with this account that while one can recognize that castles at Crowmarsh and Brightwell have a similar function in the containment of Wallingford, it is difficult to fit a castle at Reading into this operation, especially one slight enough to be destroyed by the garrison at Wallingford. As D.J. Cathcart King comments, 'Stephen's regrettable castle at Reading clearly had nothing to do with the siege of Wallingford'.[18] Crowmarsh is just across the river and Brightwell is within three miles, while Reading is some fifteen miles away, the other side of the Goring Gap. Two possible means of resolving this problem suggest themselves. The first is that by mentioning Brightwell and Reading in the same sentence Torigni gives a false impression of what was happening. The second is that Reading is a mistake for Cholsey.

This is a tempting suggestion. In this paper it is suggested that on the Berkshire side there were three castles; one at Brightwell, another at South Moreton, and the third (which might be Torigni's 'Reading Castle') at Cholsey. All three may not have been operational together, Cholsey possibly being substituted for South Moreton in 1151, if one were to adopt the somewhat unsafe course of believing that Torigni's omission of South Moreton in his account was accurate.

All the references to Reading Castle in this context in the chronicles derive from Robert of Torigni's chronicle.[19] Antonia Gransden describes him as 'a factual and on the whole accurate historian',[20] and identification of Cholsey Castle as the castle destroyed by Henry's garrison in 1153 must assume that Torigni made a mistake. For English affairs from 1112 to 1147 Torigni depended on Henry of Huntingdon's work. Thereafter he wrote, without a written source, 'annals compiled fairly contemporaneously with the events recorded'.[21] He did, however, live in France. He was Prior of Bec from 1147 till 1154 when he became abbot of Mont St. Michel. He died, still abbot, in 1186. He visited England in 1157 and 1175. As Cholsey was owned by the Abbey of Reading, and was in the Hundred of Reading, and as the castle was close to the church, it is possible that Torigni thought that Cholsey Castle was actually at Reading, and so wrote as he did.

Nevertheless it is not necessary to suppose that Torigni was wrong, except to say that he overlooked the existence of one or two castles. The existence of Cholsey as a castle must stand or fall by the physical remains, and not by Torigni's evidence. It must also be said (as will be suggested later) that Reading, at a distance of fifteen miles, was not so far from Wallingford as to be irrelevant to the military situation there.

THE STRATEGY

The theory of the temporary and sometimes makeshift castles known variously as siege- or counter-castles does not seem to have been worked out with any thoroughness. The indexes of books on castles and siege warfare usually have few or no references to these fortifications. The very terminology is unsettled. The fact tht no siege- or counter-castle has survived in a condition which might make it a tourist attraction is probably a major cause for this neglect.

[18] King, *Castellarium*, 567.

[19] Curiously a great siege was described in the *Chronicon monasterii de Melsa* (Meaux) (ed. E.A. Bond, Rolls Ser. 43.1 (1866), 435–6) as taking place at Reading in 1224, which in fact concerned Bedford Castle: King, *Castellarium*, 14.

[20] A. Gransden, *Historical Writing in England, c. 550–c. 1307* (1974), 262.
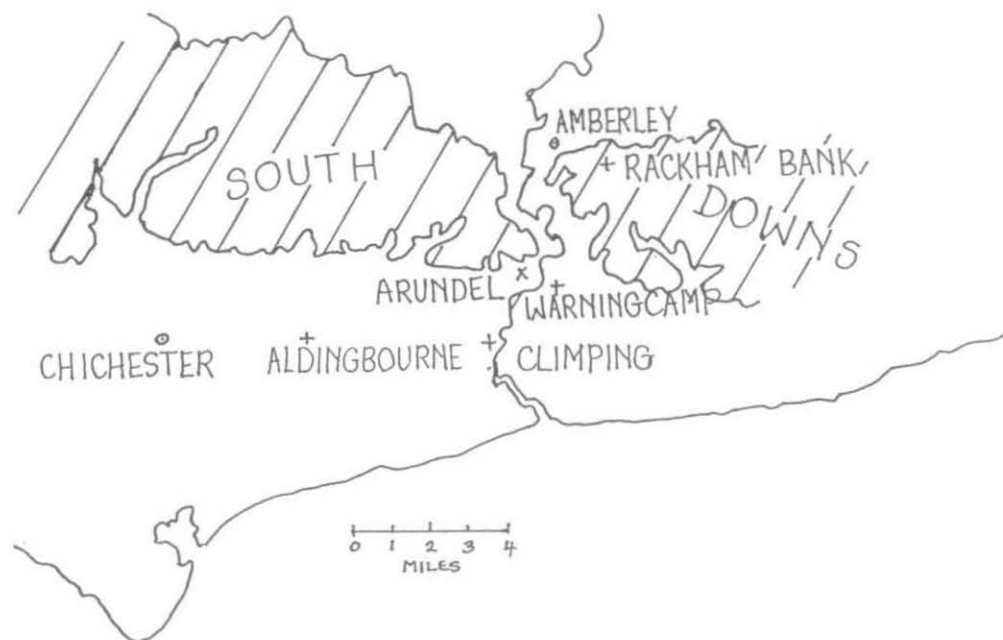
[21] Ibid.

Fig. 4.   The siege of Arundel Castle, 1102 (land above 200 ft. hatched).

Two main approaches to the subject of counter- or siege-castles can be distinguished. E.S. Armitage, writing in 1912, noticed that most of the references to siege-castles referred to castles which were left behind by a besieging army to maintain a presence or an attenuated form of siege, a siege that relied, for instance, on starvation for its successful conclusion rather than on an assault. Their purpose was 'not actual attack, but to watch the besieged fort and prevent supplies from being carried in'.[22] Jim Bradbury, however, concentrates on the use of a siege-castle in the actual prosecution of a major siege by a large force, its primary purpose being 'to protect the besiegers', though it could also be used to blockade a castle.[23] Confusingly, Mrs Armitage refers to her castles, built at the expiry of the active prosecution of a siege, as 'siege castles', while Bradbury calls his castles, built for the siege, as 'counter castles'.

If two terms are needed, it seems sensible to keep the name 'siege-castle' for those works thrown up during the active prosecution of a siege, and 'counter-castle' for those works used in opposition to an enemy castle, but not necessarily as part of an actively offensive operation against it. All castles are a defensive tactic, but some may be part of an offensive strategy. If one term only is needed for these castles, then perhaps 'counter-castle', being the looser is to be preferred.

[22] E.S. Armitage, *The Early Norman Castles of the British Isles* (1912), 85. See also J.C. Cathcart King, *The Castle in England and Wales. An Interpretive History* (1988), 3–4. For an appreciation of Mrs Armitage's work, J. Counihan, 'Mrs Ella Armitage, John Horace Round, G.T. Clark and Early Norman Castles', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, vii (1985), 73–87.
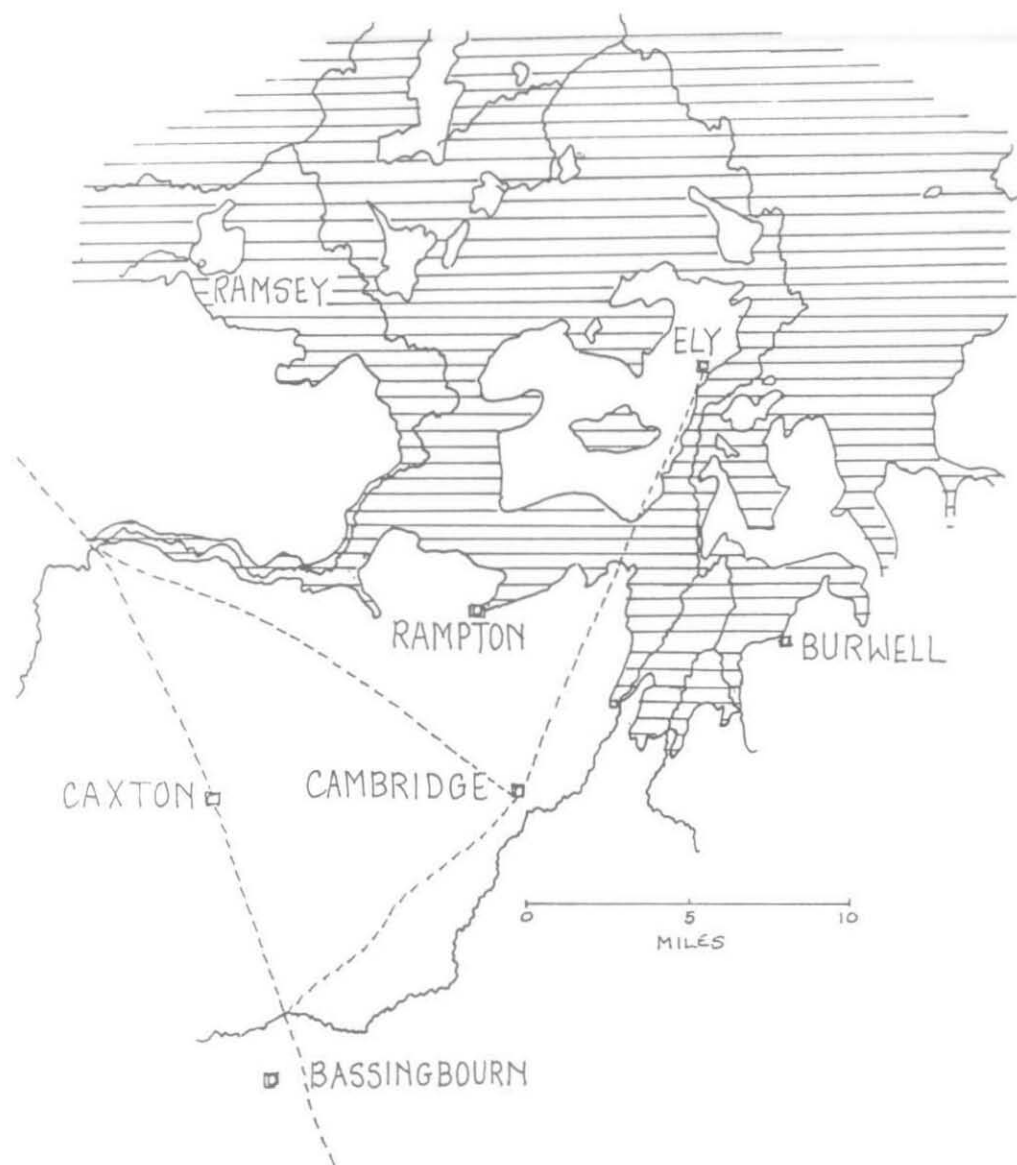[23] J. Bradbury, *The Medieval Siege* (1992), 92–3.

Fig. 5. The containment of Ramsey Abbey, 1144 (fenland hatched).

Returning to a discussion of the occasion and use of these fortifications, it is not necessary to decide between Armitage and Bradbury – the difference between them is largely one of emphasis. It is extremely likely that all but the most self-confident force would erect some sort of physical barrier between itself and the besieged castle as a defence against surprise attacks by the garrison. In the event of the commander of the besieging forces wishing to use the greater part of his army elsewhere, the building of a fortification would enable a much smaller
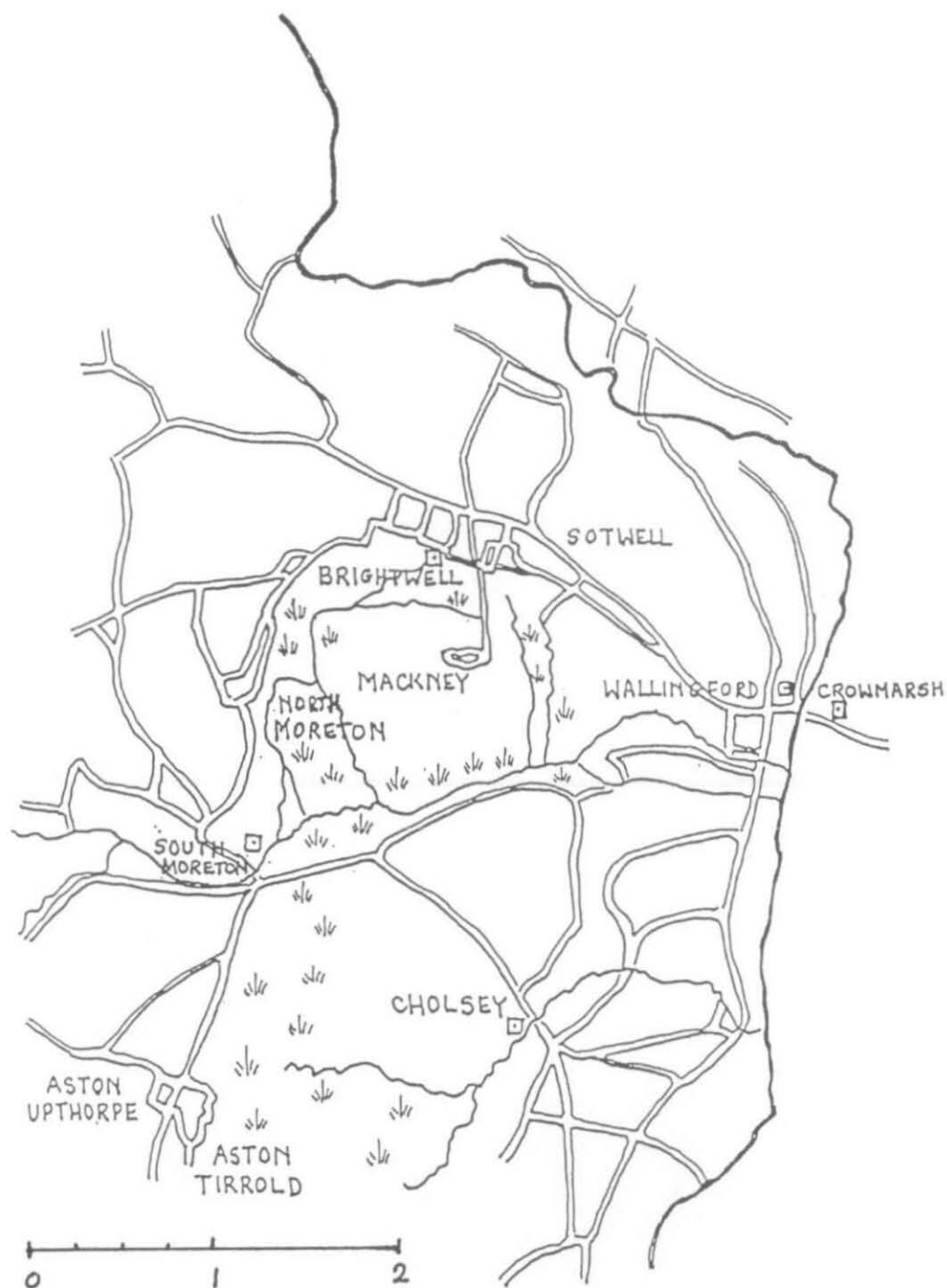
Fig. 6. The containment of Wallingford Castle 1146–53, showing area W of Wallingford. (Roads, tracks and marshes as shown in J. Rocque's *Topographical Survey*, 1761.)

force to carry on what would then be a much longer siege – a siege which relied on blockade and starvation rather than assault or intimidation, both of which had *ex hypothesi* already failed.

Stephen Morillo, the latest writer on the subject,[24] suggests that a counter-castle 'served a double purpose of restricting the activities of the target castle's garrison, neutralizing it as a force in war, and preventing foraging by the garrison or the introduction of fresh supplies into the target castle, so as eventually to starve it into surrender . . . . One advantage of using counter-castles was that it allowed prosecution of the blockade with a minimum of men, leaving the bulk of the king's army free to move against other targets'. He seems to support Mrs Armitage's emphasis. But it is likely that every siege- or counter-castle was constructed with one or other of these purposes as the primary one, the second not being necessarily excluded. To a certain extent the siting of the counter-castle is a guide to its primary purpose.

Siege castles have been recorded close to the besieged castle. D.F. Renn[25] estimated that the optimum distance was between two and three hundred yards, but recognizes that some were much further away. At Rochester, where the castle was besieged in 1088, the siege castle, Boley Hill, was built almost adjoining the enemy's fortification.[26] At Corfe, earthworks, identified as a siege-castle erected during Stephen's unsuccessful siege of 1139, lie some 400 yards from the castle.[27] In Huntingdon, probably during a siege in the 1170s, a siege-castle was constructed some 200 to 300 yards from the castle.[28] When Henry I in 1102 moved on from the siege of Bridgenorth he left behind a siege-castle at Oldbury, about a mile from the besieged castle, though Renn notes another siege castle at a distance of 350 yards.[29]

There were also the counter-castles which would seem to have little function in the active prosecution of a blockade. They are built too far away to prevent any stores being taken into the castle, and seem rather to defend certain lands from raiding which might be carried on by the garrison of the enemy castle.

Henry I's siege of Arundel, which lasted for three months in 1102 and ended in the garrison requesting permission of their lord to surrender as he could not relieve them,[30] provides an example of the siting of counter-castles, some with the priority of blocking the way to the enemy castle and some with the priority of defending land. Robert de Bellême's castle was in rebellion against Henry I, and most of the estates in the area were held of Robert, with the exception of the bishop of Chichester's estates centred on his manor at Amberley, which was not yet fortified, and at Aldingbourne,[31] which was probably not yet fortified either. The bishop was loyal to Henry I.

[24] S. Morillo, *Warfare under the Anglo-Norman Kings, 1066–1135* (1994), p. 137.

[25] D.F. Renn, op. cit. note 6, 108.

[26] King, *Castellarium*, 232–3.

[27] E. Curwen, 'Rackham Bank and Earthwork,' *Sussex Archaeol. Collections*, lxxiii (1932), 168–86, at p. 182, quoting Armitage, *Early Norman Castles*, 138; Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England) report, *Dorset*, iii, 96, No. 176.

[28] *V.C.H. Huntingdonshire*, i (1926), 288.

[29] King, *Castellarium*, 427; Renn, op. cit. note 6, 111. See also recent studies, C. Lewis, 'Paired mottes in East Chelborough, Dorset,' *British Archaeol. Report, British Series*, 209 (1989), 159–71, where the siege-castle is just out of bow shot at 110 metres, and D.J. Bonney and C.J. Dunn, 'Earthwork castles and settlement at Hamstead Marshall, Berkshire,' ibid. 173–82.

[30] Ordericus Vitalis, *Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and tr. M. Chibnall (1969–72), vol. 6, 19/20–21/22. But see also S. Morillo, *Warfare under the Anglo-Norman Kings*, 143, who suggests that the castle fell to an assault.

[31] For a discussion see T.C.M. and A. Brewster, 'Tote Copse Castle, Aldingbourne, Sussex,' *Sussex Archaeol. Collections*, cvii (1969), 141–79. They incline to a somewhat later date, 'probably' during the episcopate of Seffrid de Escures, 1125–47 (p. 166). They state, however, that it is 'certain that the castle was built and owned by the bishops of Chichester in the first half of the twelfth century'.

Counter- or siege-castles have been suggested for sites dominating fords over the river Arun at Warningcamp in the parish of Lyminster[32] and at Ford in the parish of Climping.[33] At Warningcamp there is a low platform, embanked on one side,[34] while at Ford there is no more than a field called Mount Field – a common designation apparently for a field in which a motte is to be found – but where the site of any castle has been destroyed by river embankments and railway construction. There is a third castle on Rackham Hill,[35] some 4¾ miles from Arundel Castle as the crow flies, and overlooking Amberley. Cathcart King suggests that there may have been other castles too. Warningcamp is a mile from Arundel Castle; Ford is nearly three miles, but both would have prevented excursions from Arundel along the coastal plain to the east. Rackham Hill commanded the road to the north, and in particular to the episcopal estates at Amberley. Nothing has hitherto been suggested for sites of siege-castles on the western approaches to Arundel Castle, but it may be that the castle at Aldingbourne owes its origin to this campaign. A castle here would have protected both the bishop's estates at Aldingbourne and his cathedral and palace in Chichester.

Thus the counter-castles at the fords over the Arun, close to the enemy castle, have the appearance of having been built primarily to prevent supplies being taken into the castle, and to contain it, while the outcome of the campaign was decided elsewhere. The other two, more distant castles, had as their primary purpose the defence of friendly territory from the enemy's raids, but, of course, they also ruled out that territory as a source of his supplies.

Nevertheless the classification of counter-castles by means of their distance from the enemy castle is not straightforward. Considerable distances have been recorded between castles which were interlocked either against each other or in mutual support. The *Gesta Stephani* gives several examples of long-distance surveillance. In 1139 Henry de Tracy, acting on Stephen's behalf, attacked Dunster Castle and checked the raids of its garrison from a base as far away as Barnstaple, some thirty-six miles.[36] Again, in 1138, when Stephen proposed building a castle before Harptree Castle (*castellum praestruere*), his advisors pointed out that the garrison at Bath could equally well keep the enemy in check (*gravare*), 'especially because there was a short and easy journey between the two strongholds'.[37] The journey was one of fifteen miles. Devizes was used as a base against Trowbridge at a distance of ten miles in 1139.[38] In 1141 Matilda proposed building a sort of anti-siege castle, to protect Winchester, at Wherwell, some six miles away according to the author of the *Gesta Stephani*[39] but in actual fact ten miles, 'that thereby the king's forces might more easily be held in check (*arcerentur*) and supplies brought into the city in more adequate quantities'. There were also twin castles at Cricklade and Purton (Wilts.), about four miles apart,[40] and perhaps at Lidelea and Farnham, a similar distance from each other.[41]

[32] Map ref. TQ 030068: Curwen, 'Rackham Bank', 180; King, *Castellarium*, 473.

[33] Map ref. TQ 005042: Curwen, 'Rackham Bank', 180. No notice by King.

[34] Thus King; Curwen describes the remains as a small work, 300 yards from the river, 'consisting of a raised mound, which was surrounded by a vallum and a fosse', and interprets it as 'a defensive work'.

[35] Map ref. TQ 050125: Curwen, 'Rackham Bank', 168–182; King, *Castellarium*, pp. 473–4.

[36] *Gesta Stephani*, 82/3.

[37] *Gesta Stephani*, 68/9; King, *Castellarium*, 443. Map ref. ST 561557.

[38] *Gesta Stephani*, 96/7.

[39] *Gesta Stephani*, 130/1.

[40] King, *Castellarium*, 387, 501, offers Black Bourton as an alternative identification to Purton, at a distance of some twelve miles.

[41] Lidelea has been identified with Barley Pound, three miles or so to the west of Farnham: D.J.C. King and D.F. Renn, 'Lidelea Castle – a suggested identification', *Antiquaries Journal*, 51 (1971), 301-3. One of the authors' hesitations about the identification is the proximity of Farnham Castle. This proximity need not be an objection because, as we have seen, a pair of castles was a recognized strategy.

The largest network of counter-castles recorded seems to have been that surrounding Geoffrey de Mandeville in his base at Ramsey Abbey in 1142–3.[42] The *Gesta Stephani*[43] gives us the rationale of these castles. The king 'caused castles to be built in suitable places, and, placing garrisons in them to overawe the marauders, he went elsewhere to attend to other matters'. Lethbridge, who comments on the south-eastern sector of the encirclement, suggests that the network may have extended as far as Wisbech, Thetford and Weeting – all castles already built. Geoffrey's operations extended beyond Cambridge to Mildenhall in Suffolk, and he was in contact with Earl Hugh Bigod who maintained castles loyal to Matilda in East Suffolk.[44] It seems, however, a little exaggerated to describe castles in Norfolk or Suffolk as counter-castles to Ramsey. A study of the earthworks in Cambridgeshire, as shown in *The Victoria County History*,[45] suggests that Caxton, Rampton, Burwell and Bassingbourn may well have all been built as part of Stephen's campaign against Geoffrey de Mandeville, and combined with existing castles at Cambridge and Ely. The whole series lay no nearer than fifteen miles from Ramsey.

We might define a counter-castle as a castle whose erection or use is determined by the presence of an enemy stronghold in the vicinity. From a tactical point of view three types of counter-castle can be distinguished, though their functions often overlap. First, there are those castles built to defend the attackers during a short siege which relied, for instance, on assault for its final outcome. Second, those castles which were left behind by the main attacking force to reduce the enemy castle by, for instance, starvation. Third, those castles which were built to contain or neutralize the hostile potential of an enemy castle, but without any immediate plans for capturing it. Its fate would often be decided by the success or failure of operations carried out elsewhere.

These functions might overlap when, as at Arundel for example, the primary objective was to neutralize the castle until the issue of the campaign should be decided elsewhere. Whereas Aldingbourne and Rackham Hill were purely defensive of the lands of the allies of the attacker, the close-up castles at Ford and Warningcamp, as well as defending the countryside to the east of Arundel, also weakened the garrison by preventing supplies being carried in.

It will be seen from the foregoing analysis that Cathcart King's judgement that 'Stephen's regrettable castle at Reading clearly had nothing to do with the siege of Wallingford'[46] should be re-examined. On the other hand Slade's explanation is capable of refinement.[47] He suggests that 'Oxford Castle checked movements from Wallingford to the north, and it is probable that Crowmarsh Castle, impeding movement to the east, was still manned. At some time Stephen had built a castle to the west at Brightwell; and in 1151 the series was completed to the south by the construction of a royal castle in the grounds of Reading Abbey.'

[42] See for a discussion of this network T.C. Lethbridge, 'Excavations at Burwell Castle', *Proceedings of the Cambridgeshire Antiquarian Society*, xxxvi (1936), 121–33. He proposes castles at Burwell, Rampton, Cambridge, Huntingdon, Thetford, Ely, and probably at Wisbech, Freckenham and Weeting. D.F. Renn, op. cit. note 6, suggests Burwell and Lidgate covering the Icknield Way, Caxton on the Ermine Street, and Rampton on the Fen Causeway to the Isle of Ely from Ramsey.

[43] *Gesta Stephani*, 164/5.

[44] R.H.C. Davis, *King Stephen, 1135–1154* (3rd edn. 1990), 80–1.

[45] C.W. Phillips in *V.C.H. Cambridgeshire*, ii (1948), 16.

[46] King, *Castellarium*, 567.

[47] Slade, 'Wallingford Castle', 40.

At Wallingford (above, Fig. 6) the two siege-castles left behind in 1139 were constructed as castles intended to defend a besieging force hoping to subdue a castle quickly. When left behind with smaller garrisons they were not well fitted for the function of prosecuting a protracted siege. One, in a converted church, was destroyed almost before the main force was out of sight. The other was destroyed the next year by forces under the command of Robert, Earl of Gloucester. It is clear that their function had not been properly thought out.

In 1146 there was an abortive siege of Wallingford Castle using the forces of Rannulf, Earl of Chester, during which a strong castle, *castellum inexpugnabile*,[48] was built at Crowmarsh, across the river opposite Wallingford Castle. The building of this castle was probably accompanied by the construction of castles on the western side of the river, creating a hostile ring of castles around Wallingford. This time the strategy seems to have been better thought out, for the containment worked until 1152, when, emboldened by a period of inactivity on Stephen's part, the garrison broke out and destroyed Brightwell and 'Reading' (or perhaps rather Cholsey) Castles.

Crowmarsh constituted an active and immediate threat to Wallingford Castle, and its capture was thought necessary in 1153 to raise the third siege. By then it had been augmented in 1152 by a second, advance, castle on the bridge itself, perhaps a hundred yards from the castle walls, which was part of Stephen's siege works. The chronicles are a little ambiguous, but it has been suggested that there was also a siege-castle constructed outside the main entrance of Wallingford Castle.[49] This castle would have been in substitution for the destruction or Brightwell and Cholsey.

Before 1145 Wallingford Castle was the easternmost stronghold of a wedge of territory solidly held and extending back to Bristol. After the fall of Oxford Castle in 1141 and of the castles to the west of Wallingford such as Faringdon in 1145, Wallingford became an isolated stronghold, and remained only as a propaganda advantage and a local nuisance. Left to itself it would have been able to control the territory around it to a distance, in some directions perhaps, of fifteen to twenty miles. With a cordon of castles, such as Brightwell, South Moreton and Cholsey, and, on the east bank, Crowmarsh, foraging and pillaging would become, in King's words, 'dangerous or impossible'. Wallingford Castle would be neutralized, but not in any way threatened by the western castles unless the situation lasted long enough to exhaust its plentiful provisions. The abandonment of the siege in 1146 was probably the event which occasioned the construction of these counter-castles.

With regard to Oxford and Reading (though it is not known when the latter castle was built), the ring of castles around Wallingford means that they would hardly have been a necessary part of the containment, but, as we have seen, they were nevertheless close enough to Wallingford – fourteen or fifteen miles – to make it necessary to include them in any calculations which the garrison or a relieving force might make.

It should be noticed that the castles east of Wallingford, and Crowmarsh Castle in the west, were much stronger and larger than the usual siege-castle, which was, in King and Renn's words,[50] 'intended for hasty construction, immediate use, and fairly early abandonment'. The bishop of Winchester's castles besieging Lidelea were only some eighty feet in diameter and probably consisted of a low earthwork and ditch surrounding an inhabited area. Brightwell, South Moreton and probably Cholsey were all much larger and more permanent affairs, designed to last over some years, and Brightwell was judged worthy

[48] Henry of Huntingdon, *History*, 279.
[49] Slade, 'Wallingford Castle', 41.
[50] King and Renn, 'Lidelea Castle', 303.

of destruction in 1152.[51] They were, however, comparable in size to the Cambridgeshire counter-castles discussed above. It may be that the large areas enclosed by the moats were intended for the safe keeping of cattle; castles of a similar size have been noted elsewhere and this function suggested for them.[52]

The distance of the Brightwell, South Moreton and Cholsey 'siege-castles', and the relationship of two of them to the lands of Stephen's known supporters, suggest that they were built at a time when a siege was not contemplated, but was intended as a method of defending the surrounding countryside from the depredations of the 'besieged' castle. The year 1146 remains a suitable date, because there would have been sufficient manpower in the district to undertake the work.

The logic of the sites chosen for the castles can be followed. In the siege Crowmarsh Castle, the most offensively positioned of the series, performed the function of guarding the bridge over the river, and thus the road to Henley, and commanding the river bank opposite the Wallingford Castle, cutting off the castle from Oxfordshire to the east and preventing raiding in that direction. The river acted as a great barrier, which at once was a defence for Wallingford, but had the disadvantage, from the point of view of the Wallingford garrison, of forcing raiding parties to cross it at the bridge which was dominated by the garrison of Crowmarsh Castle.

Brightwell was largely owned by the bishop of Winchester, at this time Henry of Blois, the king's brother. He had earlier complained in 1142 or 1143 to Brian Fitz-Count, the commander of Wallingford Castle, about the latter's depredations.[53] Brightwell Castle served as a protection for his lands in particular, and, as the road from Wallingford to Abingdon and Oxford passed just to the north of the village, lands further afield were cut off from Wallingford Castle – or at least the bringing of spoil back to Wallingford was rendered difficult.

It is possible that a direct road from Wallingford to Wantage used to pass through South Moreton, which might account for the presence of a fortress here. As has been noted above, South Moreton Castle is either a fourth castle overlooked by Torigni in his account, or else it may be a predecessor to Cholsey, abandoned when the garrison moved to Cholsey. Possible reasons for such a move include that fact that Cholsey was further from Brightwell and more in the middle of the gap between Brightwell and the river to the south of Wallingford.

The road to Reading no doubt went through Cholsey in the 12th century, but its course cannot now be determined. The present road from Wallingford to Cholsey is a straight 19th-century road before the construction of which there was no such direct link.[54] A castle here would also serve to protect the estates of the abbey of Reading, which owned Cholsey and was loyal to Stephen. This latter point may well have been the dominant reason for the move from South Moreton, if move there was.

Finally, the building of St. Agatha's church within the moat at Brightwell suggests that Bishop Henry of Blois had ideas of refortifying Brightwell Castle and of making it a permanent counterweight to Wallingford Castle, which he presumably believed would remain a threat to his possessions.

[51] Torigni, *Chronica*, 174.

[52] D.F. Renn, op. cit. note 6, 111, puts forward as 'mottes with a large enclosure, possibly for cattle', Alderton (Northants.); Hailes and Hawridge in ?Somerset (presumably Hailes (Glos.) and Hawridge (Bucks.): King, *Castellarium*, 27, 184, the latter described as 'ring work, ditch partly wet. Area very large'); and Topcliffe (Yorks.).

[53] H.W.C. Davis, 'Henry of Blois and Brian Fitz-Count', *English Historical Review* xxv (1910), 297–303, gives the text of the exchange.

[54] J. Rocque, *A Topographical Survey of the County of Berks. in Eighteen Sheets* (1761). His map shows that the present main road from Wallingford to Reading existed by 1761.