

Salisbury, Wiltshire: archaeology and history (notes for visitors, prepared by the Royal Archaeological institute, 2017)

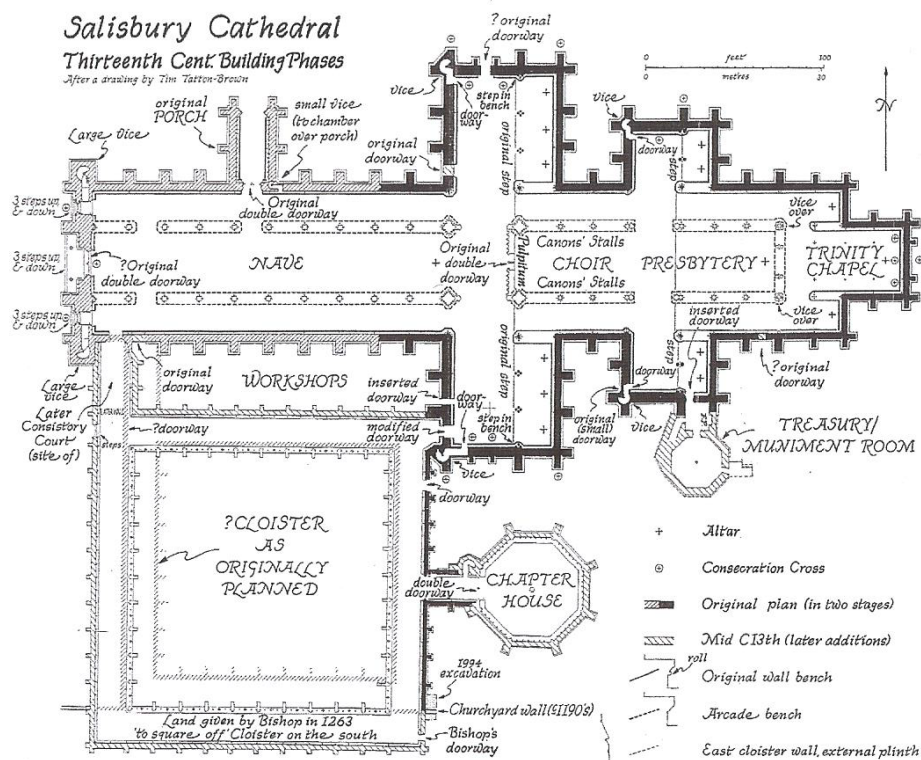
New Salisbury is the successor to Old Sarum (see separate on-line entry), resulting from the relocation of the cathedral to the more spacious and quieter site by the River Avon. There are five parts in these notes: Part 1 is on the cathedral itself, Part 2 on the surrounding Close, Part 3 on the city, Part 4 on recent research and Part 5 on the water-meadows.

Part 1: Salisbury Cathedral

The laying-out of a new cathedral close in the bishop's manor of Milford was probably undertaken in the later 1190s under Bishop Herbert Poore (1194-1217). A rectangular area, surrounded by a wall, was first created for the consecrated ground of the churchyard, to contain the cathedral, cloister, chapter-house and cemetery. Because of the chaos of King John's reign, no work was started on the cathedral until a Papal licence was given to Bishop Richard Poore (1217-28) on 29th March, 1218. Work on laying out the plan of the vast new cathedral (c. 475 feet long) and the digging of its foundations down to the gravel bed 5 feet



below the ground surface was almost certainly started immediately, and on 28th April 1220 five or more main foundation stones were laid, possibly those with consecration crosses (photograph: Tatton-Brown and Crook 2014, 39; a brass cross would have been in the inset, and the stone painted). Work then continued rapidly on the eastern chapels, and they were consecrated on 28th September 1225. The following year, with work on the enormous eastern arm



and transepts under way, the coffins of the three Norman bishops, 'Blessed' Osmund, Roger and Jocelin, were brought down from the earlier cathedral. Remarkably, the three coffin covers survive. Work on the eastern arm was probably complete by 1244, which is probably when the first full

services started in the choir. The original 106 canons' and vicars' stalls, with the slightly larger ones of the dean, precentor, chancellor and treasurer in the 'corners', that were made in 1236 still survive. Work then continued on the nave and the upper part of the west front, and the whole building would have been complete by the time of its consecration on 29th March 1258 (plan: Tatton-Brown and Crook 2014, 55, drawn by Jill Atherton; see Part 4 below for a summary of recent research). By this time also the great free-standing bell-tower immediately north of the north porch was also finished, and capped with a timber belfry and spire 200 feet high; by the late fourteenth century a clock had been added. Alas, the whole bell-tower was demolished in 1790.

A cloister and chapter-house were planned from the beginning, and the east walk and chapter-house vestibule were started in the 1220s. However, by the time that the cloister was finished in the early 1260s its plan had been altered to enlarge the south and west sides, and it was given quadripartite rib-vaults throughout. It was the largest cloister in Britain, and had arcades in the new 'French Gothic' style, introduced to England at Westminster Abbey in 1246. The chapter-house is also a close copy of Westminster's. We are told that:

The church of Sarum was commenced building in the time of King Richard and continued through the reigns of three kings and was completed on the 25th March in the year 1266, the whole expense of the fabric up to that time having been 42,000 marks (i.e. £28,000).



The building of the colossal tower and spire (404 feet high) is not documented, but must have been carried out in the early decades of the fourteenth century under bishops Ghent (1297-1315) and Martival (1315-30), whose wonderful tombs still survive on either side of the presbytery (for a full account of the medieval cathedral and its subsequent development, see Tatton-Brown and Crook 2014; air photograph from the south by John Crook).

Part 2: The Close

The cathedral clergy took full advantage of the space gained by moving from Old Sarum to the river meadows from the 1190s onwards. The senior clergy did not live communally, so a road was built around the churchyard wall, fronting a series of large plots allocated to the

rearrangement of the properties even before the Dissolution took many of the houses into secular hands on leases from the Dean and Chapter. Wealthy tenants with long leases in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries modified the medieval buildings, or demolished them.



Part of a later eighteenth-century painting of Salisbury by an unknown artist, from the south-west. The red brick building in the corner at the end of the south wall of the Close is one of the canonries, with what is now the bishop's palace next to it, in the trees. The high brick building west of the cathedral is Myles Place, built 1718-22; as the picture shows the side and back view, it does not reveal that the front has a suave stone façade. Beyond it are the stone-built King's House and Deanery. On the north-west side of the cathedral is the thirteenth-century bell-tower, then with a pyramidal roof that had replaced its spire in 1758. In the town beyond are the towers of St Thomas's and St Edmund's. (In private possession: photograph by John Crook. See Tatton-Brown 2014.)

The Close is therefore a compendium of architectural styles. As courtyard arrangements gave way to more integrated buildings that presented a façade set back from a street frontage, so the buildings set directly against the Close walks were mostly removed; only the North Canonry retains some of its late medieval appearance, with a gate block built right up against the roadway. The house in the north-west corner was 'Hemingsby's', named from an early fourteenth-century owner, who may have built the surviving two-storey porch; the only other extant medieval work in it is the much altered fifteenth-century hall, originally open but ceiled over in the seventeenth century.



Air photograph by John Crook, showing part of the west side of the Close. Myles Place is near the bottom, with the Walton canonry nearer the camera. Beyond them is the gravelled forecourt of the King's House, behind which are the chapel and students' accommodation built when it was a college (see below). The stone building with the buttresses is part of the Deanery. The North Gate can be made out, leading

into the broad High Street to St Thomas's, and the market-place to its right. The church with the spire is nineteenth-century. Compare with the air photograph from the west, Harnham, below.

Another form of ecclesiastical institution within the Liberty of the Close but outside the walled area was a hospital founded in 1245, probably for the sick and infirm. It was built by Bishop Bingham close to the new bridge across the Avon, which was built at the same time and which its Warden was to oversee.

The Close was originally enclosed by a stone-lined drain, and from the later thirteenth century a wall, which was licensed to be crenellated in 1327, and incorporates much stone brought from Old Sarum, including a number of twelfth-century carved bosses, set to be visible externally. The North Gate, facing the town, is also crenellated, and had a portcullis



added to it in the fifteenth century (photograph by Galunya 1402 reproduced under Common Licence agreement, accessed from Wikimedia). These defences reminded the townsfolk that the bishop, dean and chapter were their feudal lords, and the row of shields, now blank, on the gate's outer façade was probably originally painted with the arms of the cathedral's main patrons, a warning to the townsfolk of the support that the church could

command. The citizens resented its control over their affairs: Bishop Aiscough was murdered by a mob in 1450. The royal arms were added in the seventeenth century, and the niche on the inside that probably once contained an iconic statue now displays Edward VII.

The early fourteenth-century St Anne's Gate with a pointed arch gateway but no other elaboration except for windows seems not to have made the same challenge to the town on the west side of the Close. It was enlarged to the west when the Vicars' Chapel was built over it. The unfinished Harnham Gate of c. 1500, although now the most remote, faced the main Exeter road, but was by-passed in 1932. Consequently this gate had machicolations on its

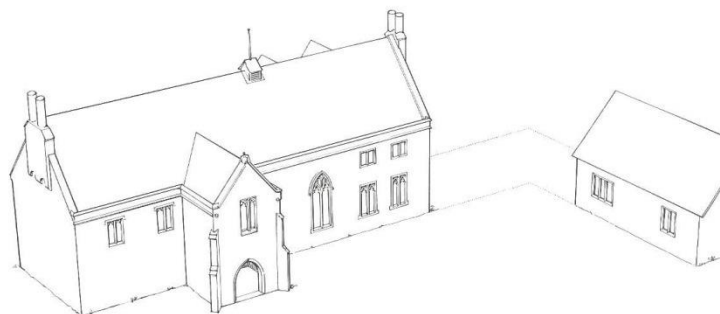
outside front, as well as finely carved gargoyles and string-courses.

One house in the Close that can be visited is now the Salisbury Museum, which moved into 65 The Close in



1983, taking over premises vacated by a Training College that had been on the site since 1852. The medieval owner was the Abbot of Sherborne, who continued to hold the prebend after the bishop ceased to be titular head of Sherborne priory in the mid twelfth century, the bishopric having been at Sherborne until 1075. After the Dissolution in 1539 its ownership was disputed between the town and the dean and chapter; it was leased, sometimes by tenants

who spent money on it, sometimes by tenants who wanted to make money from it. It is called the King's House solely because King James I briefly stayed in it. The main building retains a fine two-storey late fifteenth-century porch with fan-vaulted roof, which led into a screens passage, with service rooms to the left, above which were chambers, and an open hall on the right. This can be identified by the window jambs on the exterior – which like the porch vault are of Ham Hill stone brought from Sherborne Abbey's



As in 1500



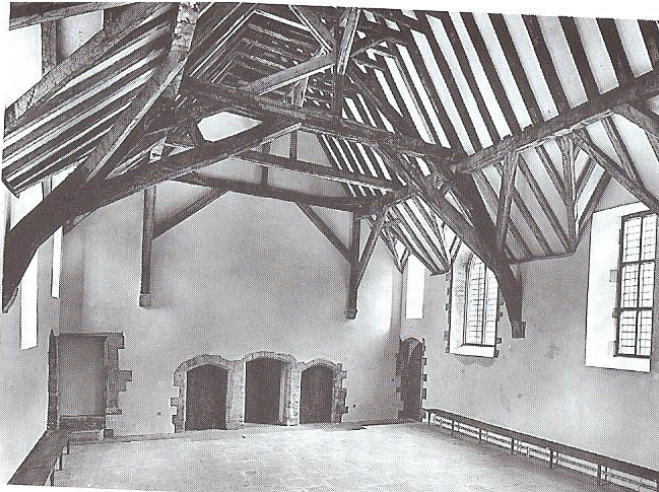
quarry, not the more local Chilmark from Tisbury. Beyond the hall was a two-storey parlour and chamber. The hall was ceiled over in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century when the brick range with the bay windows was added. The other range is nineteenth-century but incorporates a medieval building (photograph: Salisbury Museum; drawing, RCHM 1993, 216 by courtesy of Historic England).

Salisbury Museum contains most of the Pitt-Rivers collection, from south-west Wiltshire and Dorset; most of the Stonehenge excavation finds; the more recently excavated ‘Amesbury



archer’ (photograph by courtesy of Salisbury Museum) and ‘Boscombe bowmen’; some Roman material from Old Sarum and elsewhere; and Anglo-Saxon cemetery finds, including the important male burial at Ford and female burial at Swallowcliffe, both probably seventh century; all these are in the new Archaeology of Wessex gallery refurbished with a Heritage Lottery Fund grant and opened in 2014. Still much as displayed when the Museum moved into the building are high-quality material from Clarendon Palace, and more everyday things from within the city, many found during drainage works in the 1850s. There are also ceramics, costume and local history galleries, and pictures that include some outstanding local scenes by J.M.W. Turner.

North of the Abbot of Sherborne’s house was the cathedral dean’s, with a fine open hall as its central focus. The medieval structures that survived were very nearly demolished in 1960, and most of the attached buildings were removed or very much altered then (Drinkwater 1964). The hall is mid thirteenth-century (a comparable example in the Midlands now has a dendrochronological date of 1270-88), and has been restored as an open hall, though without a screens passage and with the entrance at the dais end. The screens end of the hall has the standard opulent medieval house arrangement of three doors, two into service rooms, the central one into a passage leading to the kitchen and other domestic buildings (RCHM 1993, 201-2). The roof has base-crucks, i.e. timbers slightly curved at the bottom



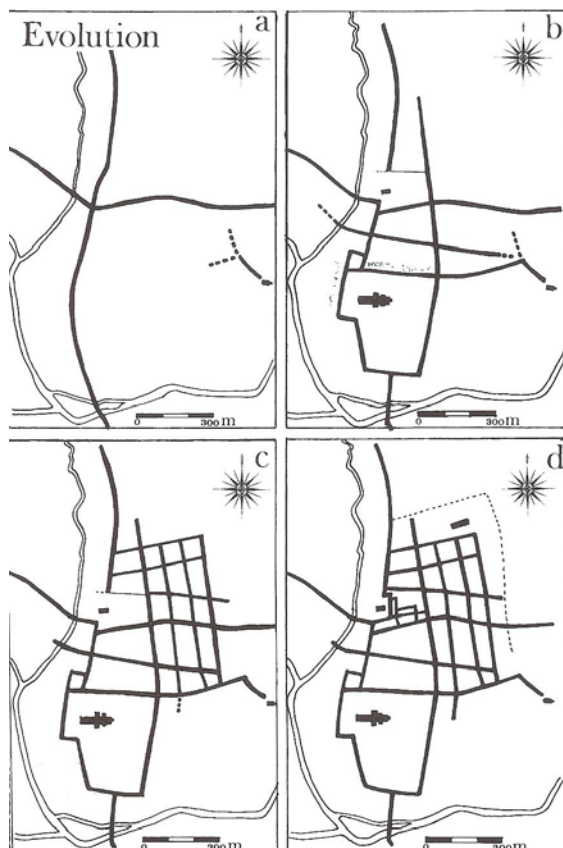
built into the externally buttressed side walls and joined at collar-beam level, a system that allowed the hall to be unencumbered by aisle-posts and tie-beams, and was a significant thirteenth-century introduction (see also Bradford-on-Avon and Avebury on-line entries). It also allowed for a large open hearth; the roof has the remains of a louvre from the period. The hearth was slightly off-centre, to favour the high end of the hall where the Dean sat on a table raised on a

dais; some of the painting that decorated the wall behind him can still be seen (see Old Deanery website for access details). In the fifteenth century a three-storey 'tower' block was added to the parlour end, and the buildings reached from the service end were rebuilt.

Part 3: The town

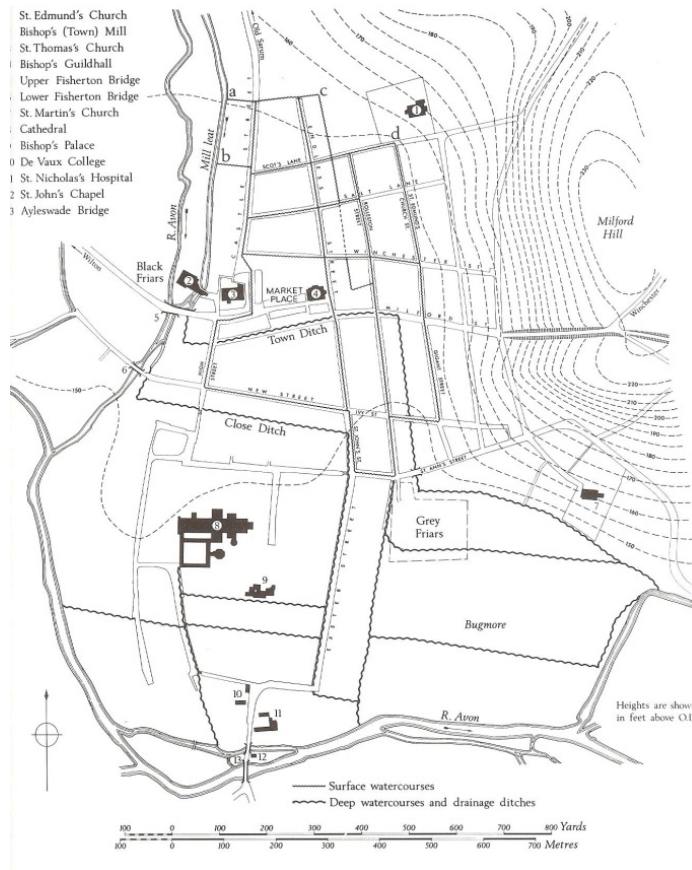
With its large market-place and its almost rectilinear street plan, Salisbury as laid out by the Bishop was the epitome of a medieval town. Pre-existing features and the local topography had to be taken into account, however; St Martin's Church almost certainly had an earlier settlement around it, roads already led to river crossings, and recent excavations have

discovered Anglo-Saxon pottery that indicate other occupation areas. Before any transfer of people from Old Sarum took place, those working on the new cathedral would have had to be accommodated. (Plan; a possible evolution sequence by John Chandler and Alison Borthwick. St Martin's is centre right. St Thomas's, centre, originally fronted on to the market-place, but this valuable space was encroached upon, with stalls replaced by permanent buildings. From Chandler 2001, 23).



Another factor was water management, and elaborate provision was made for open channels to run down the middle of or under the streets, starting from the 'high-level' Bishop's Mill leat (plan: RCHM 1980, p. xxxv). South of the market-place, and around the Close, were the 'low-level' drains fed from a leat below the Mill. These were not filled in until the cholera epidemics of the mid nineteenth century. Salisbury's 'chequers' are not therefore of

uniform size or shape. The success of the new town was rapid: in 1227 a grant was made for a town wall and gates, but recent excavation showed that construction only began after the middle of the thirteenth century, and occupation had already spread out that far (Saunders and Algar 2015). Only a small area of the earth bank and ditch is now visible, on the north side, where St Edmund's parish filled up in the later thirteenth century. Salisbury was ranked twelfth in the lists of taxed English towns, and came seventh in 1377 for the number of

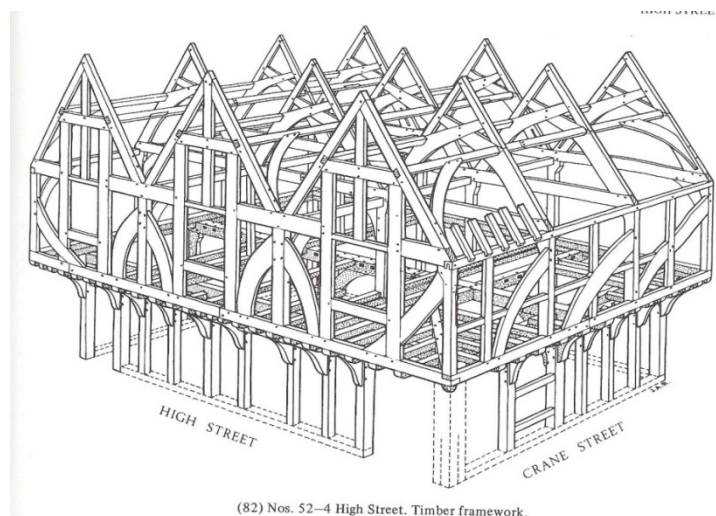


people paying tax. Such was the continuing pressure for space that the town ditch was being filled up as early as the mid fifteenth century, regardless of any need for security. The town slipped one place down to eighth in 1524, but was surpassed only by Bristol and Exeter in southern England. Cloth production and its market were the causes of its success, totalling eclipsing Wilton locally once the new Ayleswade Bridge was built at Harnham across the River Avon in c. 1240, probably replacing a deep ford.

Partly because of a relative decline in the post-medieval period, and despite breaking free of the hated bishops in 1612, Salisbury has retained at least in part many of the houses built by wealthy medieval

citizens. Despite its ground floor now being a single unit, what was once Beach's bookshop still allows the fourteenth-century frontage to be appreciated (Illus. RCHM 1980); each of the three gables marks out a separate unit, with a room for a shop on the ground floor, and a chamber behind, and a jettied upper storey of three chambers. Clearly it was built right outside the main gate into the Close as a speculative investment, for leasing out; unlike some shop ranges, it does not seem to have provided an open hall, only small back yards.

A prominent fifteenth-century citizen, John Halle, was



able to emphasize his status by purchasing a larger plot which enabled him to have a courtyard when he built himself a new residence in the 1450s/60s, of which the open hall survives. Its roof has false hammerbeams, with cusped wind-bracing. It was restored by Pugin in 1834, and has window glass and other features of that period; the stone fireplace, although fifteenth-century and having Halle's merchant's mark carved on it, may have been taken from one of the building's chambers, as the likelihood is that the hall originally had an open hearth (the hall is now part of the foyer of a cinema and is accessible with permission). An earlier, early fourteenth-century, house is William Russell's, no. 8 Queen Street, fronting the market-place and now a shop; it too was originally open from ground to roof, but has had a first-floor ceiling inserted. The timbers inside include impressive cusped arches.



As well as shops, Salisbury had many inns to cater for passing trade. What is left of the Blue Boar is now the Debenhams tea room on the north side of the market-place. A magnificent jetty post is all that remains of the George inn – a matching replica next to it shows the quality of the carving. Cross Keys still has a wooden seventeenth-century spiral staircase (Morris and Howard 1994, 31 for that and many other illustrations of Salisbury's buildings of all periods).

The plot on which John Halle built would in the thirteenth century have fronted on to the open market, but that was encroached upon, the bishop renting out space for permanent

buildings in what are now Butchers', Ox and Fish Rows. Typically, they have no rear yards.



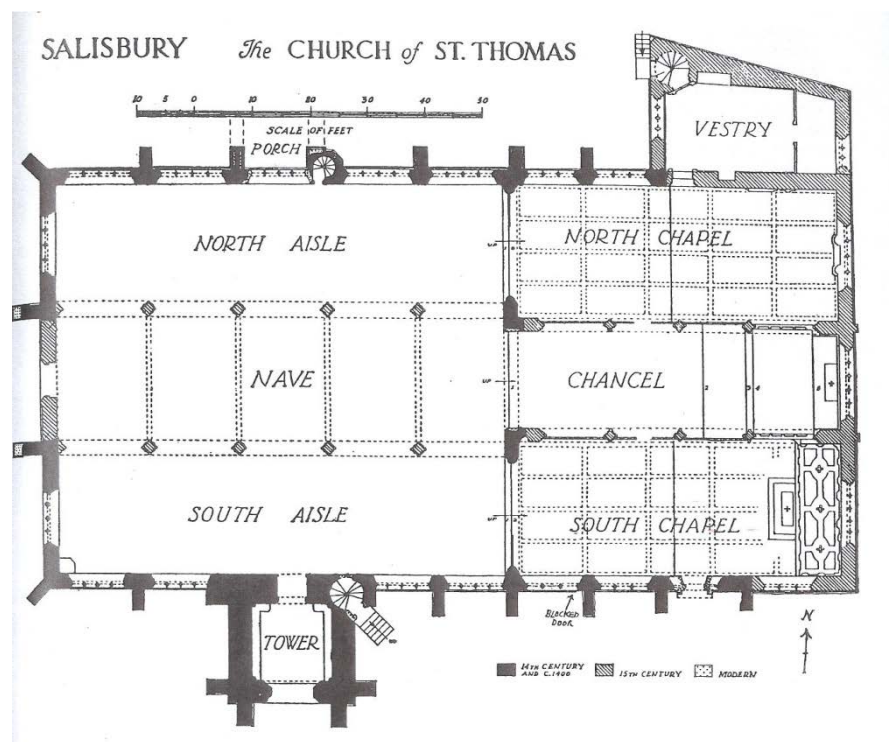
The market cross at one end of Butcher's Row was one of four; its base is fifteenth century, the upper part being added in the 1850s (photograph by Dorset Camera; the jettied building to the left and the 'Haunch of Venison' partly seen to the right are

fifteenth-century in origin, the tile-hung jettied building sixteenth-). At the opposite end of the Row is the late eighteenth-century guildhall, near the site of the Bishop's Guildhall in which the medieval bishops' agents oversaw the town's business, as was so much resented by the merchants (RCHM 1980 and Chandler 2001 for all details).

The encroachments on its churchyard have made the Church of St Thomas less prominent than it would once have been, when it fronted the market and gave God's blessing to its affairs (Tatton-Brown 1997). The tower and porch were added in about 1400, but



maintenance seems to have been inadequate, as the chancel collapsed in 1448, after which the building was taken in hand by the townspeople, who preferred to use St Thomas's rather than the bishop's cathedral. Their donations allowed the chancel to be lengthened, and then in the late fifteenth century for the nave to be reconstructed, with its great clerestorey windows. The Doom painting over the chancel arch reminded transgressors of their fate, one man's attempt to save his money-bags being especially apposite for merchants (photograph by Elisa Rolle, accessed as above from Wikimedia; plan from Tatton-Brown 1997, 103). Side chapels contained chantries where priests prayed for the souls of the donors (see also Bradford-on-Avon, Holy Trinity).



Although many of Salisbury's leading citizens sought houses in the Close released by the Dean and Chapter after the Reformation (above), there are many interesting post-medieval buildings in the town nevertheless, such as the elaborate timber-framed frontage of the Joiners' Hall in St Ann Street. Cloth production continued (the eighteenth-century painting reproduced above shows long white lines of tentering racks for drying fullered and dyed cloth in the fields behind the town). The railway came in the 1840s and 1850s, leading to development of small brick terraced rows on the west side of the town. A branch line brought goods almost into the market-place, with a stone Market House, now the library, servicing the new trade (Chandler 2001, 137-43).

Part Four: Recent research on the Cathedral and the Close

By Tim Tatton-Brown

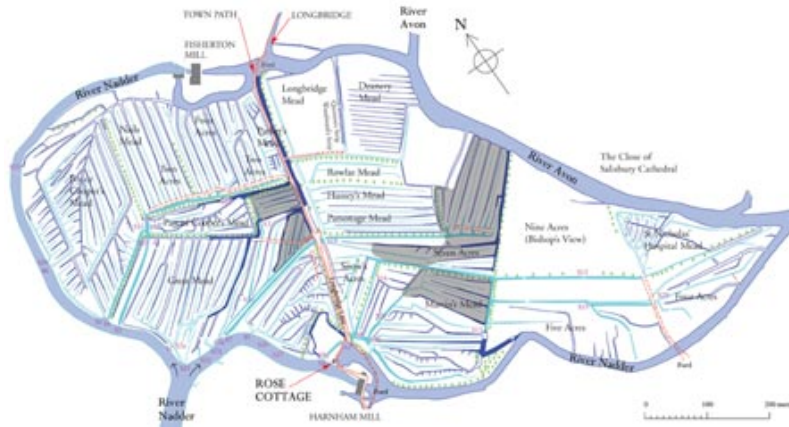
In the two decades after the Care of Cathedrals Measure 1990 became law, a detailed programme of recording and analysis of the fabric of the cathedral was undertaken while a huge and very costly conservation and repair programme was carried out by the Dean and Chapter, with large grants from English Heritage. A summary of the main discoveries and conclusions of this recording work, including a brief reassessment of the Romanesque Cathedral at Old Sarum has been published (Tatton-Brown and Crook 2014). The recording work started on the tower and spire, then on the west front and most of the other areas, including the cloisters and chapter house. English Heritage also funded a major programme of dendrochronological dating of the roofs, carried out by Dr Dan Miles, Oxford Dendrochronological Laboratory. His dates helped to fine-tune the building sequence, and he was also able to show that the principal source of the oak used was in south-east Ireland, confirming a documentary record of timber shipped by the canons from Dublin to Bristol. Unfortunately finance for full publication of all this work has not been forthcoming.

The Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England) had an office in Salisbury, but were unable to complete their proposed new architectural history of the cathedral to complement their fine inventory volumes on the buildings of Salisbury (1980) and the Close (1993). One volume on the cathedral was published (Cocke and Kidson 1993), and one on its decorative elements and contents was completed (Brown 1999). A new 'History of Salisbury Cathedral' was proposed, and a conference was held in March 2008 to get this under way, but the Dean and Chapter subsequently decided not to proceed with the project. A summary of the later medieval architectural history was published, however (Tatton-Brown, Lepine and Saul 2013).

Part 5: Harnham water-meadows and mill

By Tim Tatton-Brown

Hay meadows in the valleys of the chalk rivers and streams of Wessex could be made much more profitable for agriculture by water management. Fast-enough flowing not to freeze except in very severe winters, they could be directed through artificial channels called 'main



carriers' to a series of raised leats. Sluice-gates could be opened to allow the water to 'drown' the meadows, keeping the frost off the grass and allowing it to begin to grow earlier for an 'early bite' for the sheep – which in some areas were taken in the evening to be folded on the downs so that they manured

the next season's pasture and arable. From the seventeenth century onwards, water-meadows became increasingly elaborate and more labour-intensive to lay out and manage. The system declined from the late nineteenth century with the import of guano as fertiliser, and lack of man-power meant that few could be maintained after the Great War, although two systems are still operated. South-west of Salisbury, the Harnham Watermeadows Trust (formed in 1990) restored the meadows and rebuilt sluices and bedworks (Cook, Cowan and Tatton-Brown 2008; plan by the Trust).



Lack of water is now a problem, but when possible some of the meadows are drowned in early spring (air photograph from the west by D. J. I. Phantom, accessed under common licence from Wikimedia). The River Wylde enters upper left and joins the Avon to flow round the Close. The red brick buildings were part of the Training College (see 65 The Close, above), with the west end of the cathedral beyond).

The Town Path through the meadows leads to Harnham Mill, which makes a fine display of stone and knapped flint chequers, a decorative style favoured in the early Tudor



period. It may originally have been a fulling-mill for cloth, one of several on the outskirts of Salisbury and essential for its cloth industry, but it is also possible that it was built as a paper-mill to take advantage of the clean water in the chalk streams, and one of the earliest in England. The evidence for this is the double fireplaces (on two floors) at each end of the building, which would have been used to dry the paper. The building has also been a grain-mill and a

bone-mill (RCHM 1980, 171-2; Williams 2013, 64).

References and further reading

- AYERS, T. (ed.) 2000. *Salisbury Cathedral: the West Front: a History and Study in Conservation*, Chichester: Phillimore
- BORTHWICK, A. AND CHANDLER, J. 1984. *Our Chequered Past. The Archaeology of Salisbury*, Trowbridge: Wiltshire Library & Museum Service
- BROWN, S. 1999. *Sumptuous and Richly Adorn'd: the Decoration of Salisbury Cathedral*, London: RCHM
- CHANDLER, J. 2001. *Endless Street. A History of Salisbury and its People*, East Knoyle: The Hobnob Press
- COCKE, T. AND KIDSON, P. 1993. *Salisbury Cathedral: Perspectives on the Architectural History*, London: RCHM
- COOK, H., COWAN, M. AND TATTON-BROWN, T. 2008. *The Harnham Water Meadows: History and Description*, Salisbury
- DRINKWATER, N. 1964. The Old Deanery, Salisbury, *Antiquaries Journal*, 44, 41-59
- HARE, J. 2015. Southampton's trading partners: Salisbury and Southampton's trading partners: the small towns of Hampshire and Wiltshire', in M. Hicks, ed., *English Inland Trade 1430-1540*, Oxford: Oxbow
- KEEN, L. AND COCKE, T. (eds) 1996. *Medieval Art and Architecture at Salisbury Cathedral*, The British Archaeological Association Conference Transactions 17
- KEMP, B. R. AND TATTON-BROWN, T. 2008. The date of the cloister of Salisbury Cathedral, *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 161, 94-108
- MORRIS, R. K. AND HOVERD, 1994. *The Buildings of Salisbury*, Stroud: Alan Sutton Publishing
- ROYAL COMMISSION ON HISTORICAL MONUMENTS (ENGLAND) 1980. *Ancient and Historical Monuments in the City of Salisbury, Vol. 1*, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office
- ROYAL COMMISSION ON HISTORICAL MONUMENTS (ENGLAND) 1993. *Salisbury. The Houses of the Close*, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office
- SAUNDERS, P. AND ALGAR, D. 2015. Medieval Salisbury: new light on its eastern defences, *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine*, 108, 119-32
- TATTON-BROWN, T. 1991. Building the tower and spire of Salisbury Cathedral, *Antiquity*, 65, 74-96
- TATTON-BROWN, T. 1995. The tombs of the two bishops who built the tower and spire at Salisbury, *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine*, 88, 134-7
- TATTON-BROWN, T. 1996. The archaeology of the spire of Salisbury Cathedral, in Keen and Cocke (eds), 48-56

- TATTON-BROWN, T. 1997. The Church of St Thomas of Canterbury, *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine*, 90, 101-9
- TATTON-BROWN, T. 1999. The burial places of St Osmund, *Spire (Annual Report of the Friends of Salisbury Cathedral)*, 19-25
- TATTON-BROWN, T. WITH HOWELLS, J. 2014. A later eighteenth-century painting of Salisbury from the south-west, *Sarum Chronicle*, 14, 6-36
- TATTON-BROWN, T. AND CROOK, J. 2014. *Salisbury Cathedral: the Making of a Medieval Masterpiece*, London: Scala Publishers
- TATTON-BROWN, T., LEPINE, D. AND SAUL, N. 2013. *Incomparabilissime Fabrice*: the architectural history of Salisbury Cathedral c. 1297-1548, *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 166, 51-98
- WILLIAMS, M. 2013. *Textile Mills of South West England*, London: English Heritage

These notes were originally prepared for the annual summer 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 Salisbury were prepared by John Hare, David A. Hinton and Tim Tatton-Brown. Other on-line entries can be accessed through the RAI web-site.