



A Salisbury-Cathedral-centric view of History.

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ARCHITECT JAMES WYATT, A PROFILE by Christopher Rogers

Part 1

By the time that James Wyatt was commissioned to ‘improve’ Salisbury Cathedral in 1790, he had become one of the most celebrated architects of his time.

He had been born in Weeford, near Lichfield, Staffordshire in 1746. His family had been yeoman farmers and building contractors in that area for several generations. As a young man he joined the entourage of the Earl of Northampton, who had been appointed Ambassador to the Republic of Venice. The leading English luminary in Venice was Joseph Smith, Honorary Consul; aesthete and collector. Smith owned an enormous collection of Canaletto drawings and paintings; was a patron of several contemporary artists as well as being a champion of the works of the architect Palladio. Smith was eventually persuaded to sell his Canalettos to King George III. Through ‘Consul Smith’ James Wyatt became an acquaintance of James Dalton, who oversaw



the removal of the paintings and who was ultimately Royal Librarian. Portrait, left, *courtesy of Beckfordiana. Centre international d'étude du XVIIIe siècle, Ferney-Voltaire. In the Public Domain.*

Thanks to this acquaintance, Wyatt became known to the King for whom he would undertake substantial work in the future. Indeed, George described Wyatt as ‘the first architect in the Kingdom’. In 1762 Wyatt left Venice for Rome where he attended lectures on painting and architecture, as well as being drawn into the circles of both the painter Panini and the engraver Piranesi, both of whom were deeply involved with recording the Antiquities of the city and beyond. Remember that Rome was also the centre of the Grand Tour and many of his later patrons were persons with



whom he had met while in Rome.

Thanks to this patronage, Wyatt, aged only 22, was commissioned to build the Pantheon in Oxford Street. This was designed to be the winter equivalent to Ranelagh gardens. An unpropitious entrance on Oxford Street led into a series of public apartments, of which the crowning glory was a huge rotunda, lit from an oculus above; clearly modelled on the Pantheon in Rome. Surrounded by colonnades of scagliola marble, concealing apses (for discreet

encounters) and with 'signature' green walls, the Pantheon was an immediate success, providing Wyatt with many prestigious commissions. The Pantheon, Oxford Street painted probably by William Hodges with figures by Zoffany. Before the 1792 fire. *Wikimedia, In the Public Domain.*

One of the finest examples of his Neo-Classical phase to have survived is Heaton Hall in Greater Manchester for Sir Thomas Egerton. Below: Heaton Hall, Manchester, rear facade. *Photo by Mike Peel, Creative Commons.* The main block of the house has a central bow window which also became a signature feature of a Wyatt house.

By 1778 the fine engravings in James Stuart and Nicholas Revett's book, *The Antiquities of Athens* had become very popular and stimulated a new 'Neo-classical' taste. At Heaton, there are 'Greek' Ionic capitals, and carved panels of love scenes from Greek mythology. Always aware of new materials, all this decoration is made from the newly marketed 'Coade stone' while





inside the house, the rich interiors make use of scagliola instead of marble while cast iron is used for the staircase balustrade. As the fashionable architect for both the established aristocracy and the newly enriched industrial classes Wyatt produced many fine 'classical' houses including several houses in Ireland, of which Castle Coole, County Fermanagh is the finest survivor (above, *Photos 2006 courtesy of Andrew Humphreys, Creative Commons*). Here the south front is dominated by a huge window, while the interiors, rich in elaborate plasterwork still contain some of the fittings which Wyatt had designed for the house. It is the front hall at Heveningham Hall in Suffolk though which is the pinnacle of Wyatt's 'neo-classical' interiors. Even today it is breath-taking.

However, fashions were beginning to change. Horace Walpole had popularised the 'gothic' at Strawberry Hill, the villa he built on the banks of the Thames near Twickenham. Incorporating all manner of gothic detailing, the house is an extraordinary melange, one which caught the popular imagination. 'Gothick' houses, with gothick furnishings mushroomed, and James Wyatt was not slow to spot where the market was leading him. Towards the end of the 18th century the French Wars prevented travel, putting an end to the Grand Tour, and this too created a renewed interest in things English. Classical architecture was seen to be a foreign import and therefore a revival of the Gothic became a 'nationalist cause'. At the much the same time there was developing a scholarly interest in our medieval past, pioneered by members of the Society of Antiquarians, some of whom were to be Wyatt's nemesis.

Part 2 in next edition.

EPITAPHS

Anna Pope who died on 12th July 1751 aged 80 (in South Quire Aisle). The mason who cut the inscription put *qui* instead of *quae* which made her masculine and gave birth to a rhyme: *Here lies Pope Ann who lived a woman and died a man*. James Harris (*Copies of the epitaphs in Salisbury Cathedral* 1825) matches this with a headstone in Bemerton churchyard: *Here*

lyeth the body of Andrew Crouch, widow woman, who departed this life 19th May 1690.

One forgets how poor life-chances were in days gone by and the large percentage of people who died young. On the west wall of the South Transept are two examples:

Here is buried a most beautiful child, Ursula Sadlier, daughter of George and Catherine Sadlier. Discreet and religious beyond her age, courageous and patient of sickness beyond her sex, angelic beyond the human form, possessing that ardent affection which becomes a daughter, the stain contracted in her birth, and not her life, being consumed, carried her triumphant to heaven on 18th June, 1641, in the 11th year of her age.—

Lament also her little sister Katharine, who died on the Sunday following, and sleeps beside her.



In remembrance of the greatly lamented death of Charles Langford, LL.B., son of John Langford, descended from a respectable family in Buckinghamshire; fellow first of St. Mary's College, Oxford, and last of Winchester, who died in the 29th year of his age.

Stay, stranger! Behold him cut off in the middle of his journey, from the meeting of the Wickamists at Winchester. Appointed to accompany the Custos to visit the lands belonging to the college, while passing through this city, he was seized with a mortal disease, and died. And, oh! such a youth, of such flattering hopes, though young and small of stature, yet can there be a greater example of piety, learning, and, lastly, of all virtues, which lie so studiously and devoutly cherished, that having already almost exceeded the bounds of human excellence, he was included in the choir of angels, on the day of St. Michael and all the angels, in the year of our Lord 1635.—Nicholas, in sorrow, erected the monument to the memory of the best of brothers.

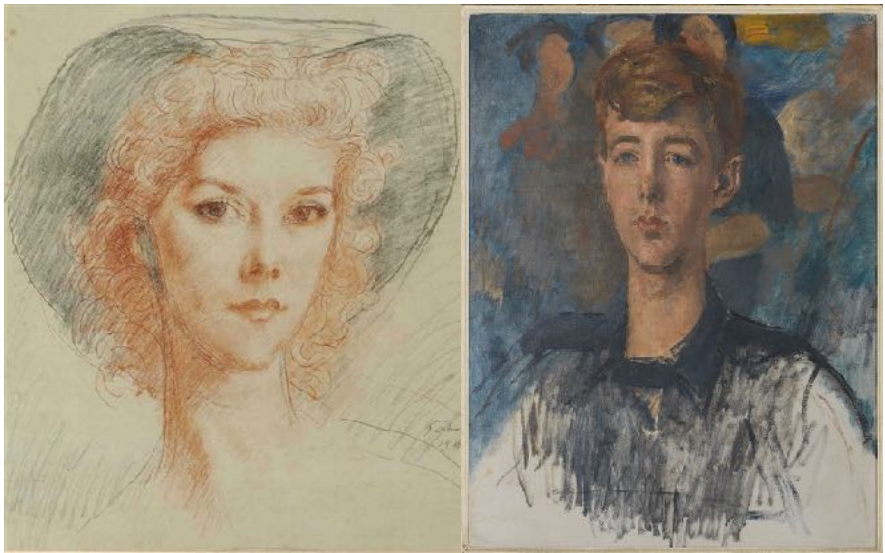
The above photos courtesy of John Bromilow's Church Monuments Gazeteer.

POTTERNE PREBEND

This info comes from *Devizes and Central Wiltshire* by John Chandler (Hobnob Press 2003). Potterne has been the Bishop's prebend since an exchange with the Dean in 1254. It became a thriving community under its ecclesiastical landlords *large and populous with extensive woodlands and pasture*. Although Devizes was a town by 1139 (under Bishop Roger of Salisbury) it was relatively small. The locals earned a reputation for drunkenness and were *a very discontented and turbulent race*. Their nickname was *Potterne lambs* but whether this was ironic or because the local policeman was *Superintendent Wolfe* is unclear.

Mavis de Vere Cole was a local resident who was divorced by her husband, archaeologist Sir Mortimer Wheeler, after discovering her with a lover here in 1941 (he was married three times). The artist Augustus John was a frequent visitor. In 1947 Mavis bought Pilgrim Cottage in

Chilbury Lane, from where she was removed to Holloway Prison, having shot and wounded another lover after a tipsy evening in the George and Dragon. We once met her son Tristan de Vere Cole at Odstock Manor - his father apparently was Augustus John!!!!!! Right, Mavis by Augustus John, courtesy of Artnet. Tristan by Augustus John, courtesy of Salisbury Museum.



WHEN ADAM DELVED

Nothing to do with history, but a new venture - CATHEDRAL GARDENERS. Sue and I have been bringing life back to the Mulberry Tree Garden behind the Chapter House (below is 'before' state) and we have just been joined by Elizabeth and Kathryn, our first two volunteers. What we ideally now require is more tools and plants (there is unfortunately no funding). So if you have any redundant garden tools in reasonable condition, or if you are splitting plants and can spare some, we would be very grateful. Please contact the editor on markandsuebrandon@outlook.com or 01722 328259.

In our sights are building raised beds for Michael Bowyer's cut flowers, clearing up when the scaffolding is removed and then tackling the neglected south-east garden at Leaden Hall.



MORE NEWS ON THE SPIRE SCAFFOLDING

An update from Ian Wheeler: Whilst leading a tower tour on Thursday 26th May it was my good fortune to meet up with two visiting dendrochronologists engaged in taking more samples from our spire scaffolding. The man in charge of the hole saw was Dr. Dan Miles, the co-author of the 2004 Historic England report on the cathedral nave roof dating. With him was a PhD student from Keble College, Oxford, who is investigating the effects of the 1362 storm in southern England. The samples are being taken to Swansea University where they will be subjected to the new and more sensitive *Stable Isotope Tree Ring Dating* test.

I watched as two cores were extracted from the timbers at the base of the scaffold, these being the two ringed with blue tape in the photograph. Both were surprised when I engaged them in conversation about the 1362 storm – Das Grote Mandrenke – The Great Drowning. It seems that the 2004 report, although available for free on-line download, has not been well received as it so directly contradicts the earlier thoughts of Clerk of Works Roy Spring and Cathedral Archaeologist Tim Tatton-Brown.

The findings of the 2004 survey provide the only scientific evidence for the dating of much of the cathedral fabric and builds on earlier evidence collected in 1999 and 2002. In total some 65 timbers have been dated so far and have provided some fascinating results. The floor of the clock chamber dates from 1242, this being assumed to be the roof timbers of the original low lantern roof lowered down when work on raising the tower and spire commenced. The West doors are largely of Irish oak felled between 928 and 1186 and there is also an Irish panel in the lower Parvis Room door where felling dates cover 1219 to 1261.

Naturally I questioned Dan on his expected findings. He had no doubt that the new samples and the new dating technique would support his earlier findings and continue to confound what has become the accepted story of the spire scaffolding. That earlier report stated that the scaffolding was *probably to repair damage sustained by the top of the spire in AD1362*. However, Dan is in agreement with his critics in that he states also that it gave *permanent internal access to the top of the spire and some tensile restraint to the capstone*. The PhD thesis is due to be submitted in September and I can't wait to read it!

You can find the highly detailed Historic England reports online at:- historicengland.org.uk

The Tree-Ring Dating of the Thirteenth-Century Nave Doors at Salisbury Cathedral.

The Tree-Ring dating of the Tower and Spire at Salisbury Cathedral.

