



A Salisbury-Cathedral-centric view of History.

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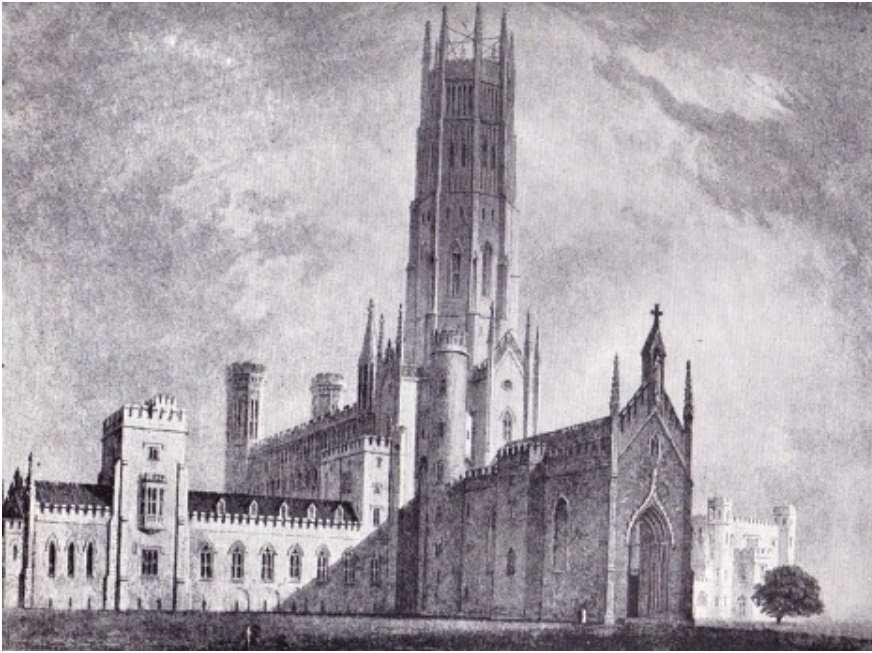
ARCHITECT JAMES WYATT, A PROFILE by Christopher Rogers

Part 2

Wyatt's gothic houses were very large and meticulously detailed showing great originality and vitality. Wyatt's first gothic house was Lee Priory in Kent which sadly no longer exists but for one room, the Strawberry Room which is preserved in the V&A. Others followed, some more inspired than others. Wycombe Abbey was for a banking dynasty, and Plas Newydd on Anglesey for the immensely wealthy Paget family (below, *BsOu10e01 creative commons*). He began the new Belvoir Castle for the Duke of Rutland, while the largest commission of all was Ashridge Park in Hertfordshire for the Earl of Bridgewater.



Fonthill (below, Fonthill Abbey by T. Higham and Z. Martin. *From Delineations of Fonthill and it's Abbey, John Rutter 1823, in the Public Domain*), is perhaps the apogee, but sadly reflects Wyatt's haphazard approach to his work, long delays, inadequate supervision and, in this case a capricious patron. The young William Beckford inherited his father's Palladian mansion, Fonthill Splendens and his huge wealth planned a 'ruined abbey' or hermitage on the hill above Fonthill before going on his grand tour. After 1778 he decided that he wanted an abbey of his own. The first plan produced in 1798 showed an octagon tower along with a spire of some 300 feet. This was soon scaled down a little and the spire was never built. Totally impractical, the building materials were often timber and cement for visual impact rather than for permanency.



It was built very quickly and shoddily. By 1801 it was largely finished, at a cost of £242,000. Four long arms radiating from a central tower with Saint Michael's Gallery over 100 feet long. The Great Hall had originally been planned as a banqueting hall but was impossible to heat so it became the state entrance instead. Construction continued until Wyatt's death in 1813, with manic periods of activity with workmen working through the night and cutting corners

in the process. Furthermore as price of sugar fell, Beckford's income shrank and much retrenchment took place. Eventually, Beckford sold Fonthill in 1822 three years before the octagon tower collapsed. By this stage client and architect were barely on speaking terms. Despite the notoriety that the building created it also popularised the idea of the medieval and especially the ecclesiastical, but did little for Wyatt's reputation.



Wilton House was 'Wyattted in good Gothick taste', the good bit was the addition of the gothic cloisters (above, filming *Emma* courtesy of Wilton House) and a gothic entrance hall. The plaster ribs are well made by his stuccoist, Benesconi as are the bosses, all done in plaster rather than stone. However the forbidding entrance front which had been castellated and the windows 'Gothicised', was toned down in the early 20th century. Sadly the work was of very variable quality, with serious drainage problems and huge cost overruns. Losing patience with the dilatory and overstretched Wyatt the Countess of Pembroke took over

the project management, sacked the architect and his team, and it was finally completed by a local Salisbury builder.

James Wyatt was very much a protégé of King George III, in whose reign Windsor Castle was to become a significant royal residence. Frogmore House and Royal Lodge were already periodic homes to the Royals, but Wyatt was commissioned to create a gothic palace within the walls of the upper court. A new grand staircase was installed complete with gothic balusters beneath a soaring gothic plaster fan vault topped with an octagonal lantern. Even in its reduced state it impresses. However, both Wyatt and the King died and the opulent interiors of today's state rooms were completed by Jeffry Wyattville, James' Wyatt's pretentious nephew, for the spendthrift George IV. The ageing and unstable King George III, alarmed by the French Revolution and then the political turbulence this generated in Great Britain commissioned Wyatt to build him a large fortress, known as Kew Castle, of which today there is no trace at all within the Gardens. It was largely complete at the King's death, but was then blown up at the behest of the new King.



Thanks to the long relationship with King George Wyatt was appointed Surveyor General and Comptroller of the Office of Works in 1796. He was indeed 'the first architect in the Kingdom'. Work poured in. A substantial remodelling of the Houses of Parliament was completed. Known as 'the cotton mill', it was universally derided and mercifully it was destroyed in the fire that engulfed the palace in 1832. At the Woolwich Artillery Barracks a new Grand Store was completed in 1813, described as a costly failure thanks to structural problems. Less controversially a new military academy was built at Woolwich, but at huge expense. He was even involved in restoration work at Westminster Abbey, much of which was destroyed in WW2. Had he lived, he would have made major 'improvements' at Durham, to which diocese Bishop Shute Barrington (left, by Thomas Lawrence, *courtesy of Wikiart. In the Public Domain*)

had been translated.

So Wyatt's work at Salisbury Cathedral, of which we are all so familiar, is but a small element of his enormous output. There is no doubt that much controversy was aroused even then and led to huge protests from the new breed of antiquarians such as John Carter and Bishop Milner. Perhaps it was Wyatt's overfull diary that was to blame. Insufficient oversight, infrequent visits led to inappropriate decisions being made by the Verger and 'on-site' manager William Dodsworth, while the client, Bishop Barrington, was allowed to make unilateral decisions. In Wyatt's later years, his 'gothic' do not live up to his youthful 'classical' promise. Too many contracts, poor management skills, limited eye for detail and chaotic financial oversight tarnished his reputation. Perhaps his untimely death in 1813 in a road accident just west of Marlborough saved him from further indignities.

THE VICTORIANS AGAIN

The Industrial Revolution stimulated a desire for self-improvement among all classes of society (sadly lacking today). Starting in the northern industrial cities, it spread south where it took the form of Literary & Philosophical societies or in Salisbury's case (right) the **Literary & Scientific Institution**. The movement was hugely stimulated by the Great Exhibition when the number of institutes doubled. With the Public Libraries Act of 1850 many institution libraries were moved to form the nucleus of local public libraries. The institutes gradually either ceased to operate or became more popular by widening their scope of activities. Highgate Literary & Scientific Institution is still thriving.



The Salisbury institute in New Street was built in 1871 by Frances Read (Hale) on the site of the New Street Theatre. It contained the Hamilton Hall, classrooms, reading rooms and staff accommodation. By 1875 it also housed a College of Art. Another building from Frances' company was Richardson Bros. Wine Stores which claimed to be the largest and oldest wine merchants in Britain. It was founded in 1672, whilst Berry Bros. & Rudd in St. James' was founded in 1698. It included offices, tasting rooms, bottling facilities and extensive cellars housing 60,000 bottles, as well as specially designed rooms for 1,000 cigar boxes. It is now Barclay's Bank in High Street/Bridge Street (below). Frances also worked with the Cathedral architect G E Street.

The following extracts are from Wiltshire-OPC (parish records project)

On Monday evening the sixth and last entertainment of the present quarter was given to the members, when Mr. B.J. Malden, of the Royal Polytechnic Institution, London, delivered a lecture on "Stanley's Journey to Central Africa and the Finding of Livingstone." Notwithstanding the inclemency of the weather there was a large audience, and the lecture and illustrative views were much enjoyed. Salisbury and Winchester Journal and General Advertiser, 21 December 1872.

AMATEUR THEATRICALS We beg to remind our readers that the entertainment by a company of young gentlemen of this city called the "Dramatic Nondescripts," will take place in Hamilton Hall, on Monday evening next, in aid of the building fund of the Literary and Scientific Institute. The pieces selected are, "Sink or Swim," and "The Model Husband," and from the distinguished list of patrons with which the performances are to be honoured, there will be, doubtless, an overflowing house. The rehearsals, although of a strictly private nature, have, we understand been highly satisfactory, and a most agreeable evening may be anticipated. The tickets are having a rapid sale, and to intending visitors we recommend application for those that remain without delay. Songs between the pieces, and the services of the efficient band, will diversify the entertainment. Salisbury and Winchester Journal and General Advertiser, 21 December 1872.



TOMB TALK - Bishop Richard Mitford

Richard Mitford (died 1407) was an English bishop of Chichester from 17 November 1389, consecrated on 10 April 1390, and then bishop of Salisbury. He was translated to the see of Salisbury on 25 October 1395.



The earliest record of him is "Richard Medeford of Hakebourne, clerk" in 1349. The cartulary of Cirencester Abbey records the Metfords of Hakebourne (modern name East Hagbourne, Berks.) as a leading freeman tenant family of the village. His name appears as "Metford" in his own household accounts and as "Medford" in the Register of John Chandler, who was Dean of Salisbury Cathedral during much of Mitford's episcopacy. Mitford, as revealed by

bequests in his own and his brother Walter's wills, had three brothers and four sisters. He spent much of his life at the royal court, starting probably as a chorister in the Chapel Royal and continuing as a clerk of the household under Edward III. His training during his time as a Fellow at Kings Hall, Cambridge from 1352 to 1374 prepared him for service in the royal bureaucracy, where he eventually rose to become Secretary of the King's Chamber to Richard II (1385 to 1388). He was a Canon of Windsor from 1375 to 1390.

Senior household members of Richard II were politically important, and his position gave Mitford considerable influence. He was one of the members of the royal household arrested by the *Lords Appellant* (Earls of Arundel, Derby, and Warwick plus Thomas of Woodstock) in late 1387 for treason, and was imprisoned first in Bristol Castle and then in the Tower of London. However, he was eventually released without penalty. From 1385 to 1390 he was Archdeacon of Norfolk. In 1389, Mitford was elected to be Bishop of St David's but was rejected by the Pope.

While Bishop of Salisbury, Mitford spent much of his time at one or another of his episcopal manors, and by chance the household accounts survive of his stay at Potterne, near Devizes, for the last seven months of his life. These give day-by-day records of members of his household and his visitors, the amounts and prices of the food provided for everyday meals as well as the feasts given at Christmas, and even at his own funeral. Such details as his charitable gifts, the fee for his doctor and how much *serecloth* (Cerecloth was a waxed cloth for wrapping a corpse) was provided for his funeral are also included.

The figure of a bishop labelled with Mitford's name appears in the illustrations of the Sherborne Missal (right, courtesy of British Library). He was a patron of Henry Chichele, who acted as lawyer for him. The Bishop's tomb is in the South Quire Aisle, photo courtesy of Ealdgyth, Creative commons.

