

THE OLD DEANERY, SALISBURY

by Dorothy Todd

IN 1217 the Bishop of Salisbury petitioned the Pope for permission to move his Cathedral from Old Sarum. By 1220 permission had been granted, and the foundation stones of the new Cathedral laid on ground which belonged to the new Bishop, Richard Poore. For some time relations between clergy and the military garrison at Old Sarum had been strained. Whilst the unsuitability of the site with its perpetual wind and lack of water was stressed in the report made by the papal legate to the Pope after the Bishop's plea to move, certainly a cause of much complaint amongst the clergy themselves was the difficulty and expense of obtaining even poor living quarters during the time they were expected to be resident at Old Sarum. Residence was a difficult problem for the clergy of most cathedrals in mediaeval times. By 15th August, 1222, the building of the new Cathedral was so far advanced that Richard Poore could issue his edict to his clergy: "—everyone who has a site must begin to build to some purpose by Whitsuntide next ensuing; or failing this, the bishop shall dispose of his site according to his discretion. But let those who are able to build and will not do so be compelled by the Bishop and the Dean." There was nothing haphazard about this plan. Poore was in a unique position: all the land which surrounded the Cathedral was his, and there were no other buildings whatsoever on it—so that he could make sure that at last the clergy of Salisbury should be adequately housed. He planned fine sites for them—those along the West Walk where the Old Deanery stands were the finest, both in situation and in size, and there his clergy could build houses befitting their dignity and also suitable for the hospitality they would have to offer.

The house which has become known as the Old Deanery was probably built between 1258 and 1277, during the time that Robert of Wykehampton was Dean of Salisbury. The sheer size and dignity of the building is in keeping with Poore's plans for the

Cathedral and its immediate surroundings, with a new town yet to come. The first known written reference to it is in 1277. Robert of Wykehampton was made Bishop of Salisbury in 1274, and in 1277 he gave his house to Walter Scammell, Dean, to be a house for the deans in perpetuity. It remained as the Deanery until 1922, through all the vicissitudes of the Reformation and the Civil Wars, gradually changing in appearance and lay-out. It was then decided the house was no longer a suitable or economical residence for a twentieth-century dean, and it was leased to Salisbury Training College who used it partly for student accommodation and partly for teaching purposes.

An inventory dated 1440 gives much information, partly about the actual furniture and furnishings, and partly providing some clue to the lay-out of the building. At that time for example, reference is made to "the old parlour which is colour washed (dyed) throughout", and a chapel is also mentioned. The contents of various rooms such as the Buttery, Pantry, Larder and Kitchen, are listed—and from these items it is possible to visualize to some extent what life might have been like when lived in such a house in mediaeval times. Particular details of this nature referring to a specific building still in existence and of such early date, are not of such frequent occurrence. There are items such as provision in the Buttery of a "hamper for keeping drinking cups" and "an iron bucket with a short chain arranged at the well and with a wooden beam for the well". In the Pantry, there is mention of "two bins for keeping bread"; and the Hall had furniture consisting almost entirely of tables of various lengths—the longest seven yards long—fixed settles, forms, and an English ewer.

Between the years 1649 and 1653 Parliamentary Surveys were made of the houses in the Close, and from these it can be seen how the house changed, the interior being divided up into various rooms whose dimensions are given. Later, the building diminished in size; in 1757, when Thomas Green was Dean, the Chapter permitted him to pull down two rooms above and below the west end of the dining-room; and in 1810, Dean Talbot pulled down the wing which extended to the east in the front court.

At some time in the nineteenth century a parapet was erected along the top of the west side of the building, presumably to

enhance its appearance—but it also cut off light and outlook from the top floor rooms. During the nineteenth century the building was covered with stucco and refenestrated. By the twentieth century the house had become a warren of inconvenient rooms, on three storeys, with four staircases.

In 1948 the Training College in response to the then Ministry of Education's request to train more teachers, and also in order to provide much needed improved accommodation both for residential and teaching purposes, began to draw up plans. As part of these plans, the Old Deanery came under consideration and finally became the object of an inquiry by the Ministry of Town and Country Planning, to decide whether or not permission should be granted to pull down the house, so that a new hostel might be built on its site. In October, 1948, the Minister gave consent for demolition. In June, 1959, shortly before this was to happen, to allow for new building extensions to the College, the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments was asked to survey the building so that a final record might be made of it. As a result of the exploratory work then done by the Commission and by the Ancient Monuments Inspectorate of the Ministry of Public Building and Works, various features of much importance were found in the structure and it was considered that sufficient of the original mediaeval Hall remained to make its reconstruction both possible and invaluable. Owing to the interest and generosity of various bodies—the Ministry of Public Building and Works, the Pilgrim Trust, the Society of Antiquaries, the Ancient Monuments Society—funds were finally made available for the restoration. The Ministry of Education also contributed, since the restoration has not only saved a building unique in England—no other thirteenth-century deanery exists—but also whilst the Training College plans for extension had to be changed, the College has benefited greatly by the reconstruction and accommodation. The mediaeval Hall is most useful for such purposes as meetings and concerts, the Solar is an additional library, and other parts are used for tutorial rooms.

In the thirteenth century the Old Deanery consisted of a Hall, with Buttery and Pantry, separated by a passage to a detached kitchen, leading off to the north from the Screens passage.

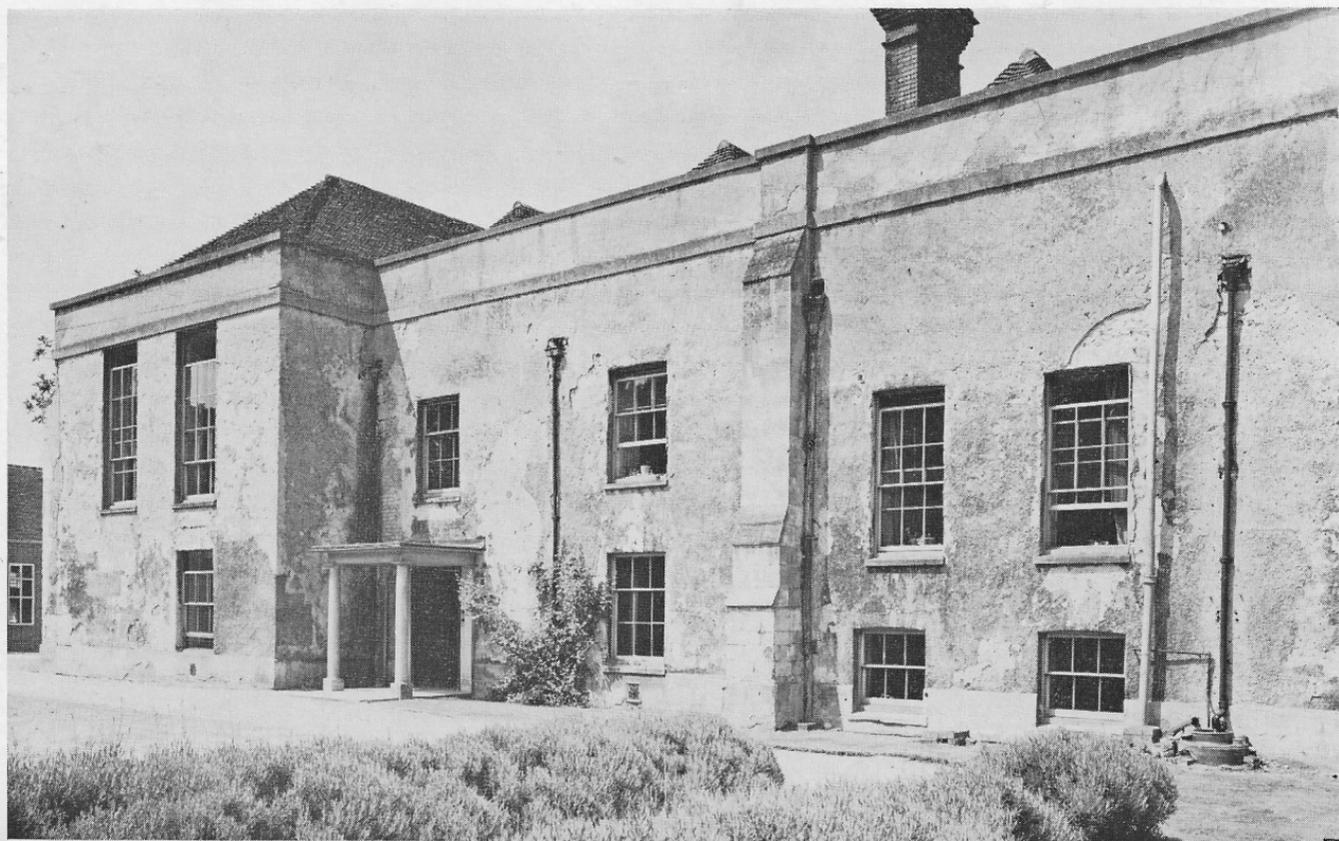


FIG. 1. East side of Hall before restoration



FIG. 2. The interior of the Hall looking North, as restored

Above the Buttery and Pantry was a guest-chamber. At the south end of the Hall was a two storeyed building, Undercroft below, Solar above, to which access was gained from the Hall at the south-west end by a door leading from an outside staircase. In the fifteenth century additional kitchen wings were built to the north-east and north-west of the Buttery and Pantry. A tower was added on the north side of the Solar and Undercroft, incorporating the external staircase, and containing rooms on three storeys. At this time also, the Undercroft was converted at the east end for use as a Parlour, windows were inserted and fire-places built at Parlour and Solar level.

The Hall must be one of the earliest in the country where the innovation was made of omitting the aisle posts, or piers, which had previously helped to support the roof. This allowed more room in the Hall itself, and the roof is supported on principals carried on stone wall corbels. Outside, buttresses help to take the thrust. The roof contains twenty-eight trussed rafters, each with two collars, supported on aisle plates which ran the length of the Hall. Below the level of the aisle plates are three bays—one encompasses the Dais—made by the principals which support the plates, in their turn supported by the stone corbels. Angle braces steady the principals and are morticed on either side of each principal, and into the plates. The trusses have tie beams, above which are King posts with scissor braces. A collar purlin runs through the entire roof—this is further strengthened by angle braces tenoned to the King posts.

During the reconstruction the whole of the roof was taken down, so that faulty timbers might be renewed. Almost the whole of the original roof, including louvre trusses, had survived, and the oak timbers were in a remarkably good state.

The plates and one main truss were renewed. A new louvre was designed based on the existing evidence. A central hearth was found, sited near the Dais end of the Hall, and on excavation it proved to be one of three hearths sited one on top of another, perhaps due to the fact—shown by the presence of alluvial silt—that the floor of the Hall was periodically flooded by the River Avon. The hearth constructed of roofing tiles laid edgeways, had pieces of charcoal on it when uncovered, and was in such good

condition that it has been possible to preserve it. The original tamped chalk floor has now, for convenience, been covered with slabs of York stone.

The outside entrances to the screens passage, from east and west were uncovered, and also the entrances from the passage to the Buttery and Pantry and to the passageway leading to the detached kitchen. The only trace of the latter was the tile-on-edge floor found in a trench to the north of the Hall. A well was discovered beyond the north end of the Hall, between the original kitchen and the two fifteenth-century additions. On excavation it yielded nothing.

On the wall at the south end of the Hall, above the Dais, remnants of decoration were found and preserved. The design is of "stiff-leaf" foliage and lined ashlar work painted with red ochre. Under this can be seen the jambs of the doorway which originally led from the Dais to the Parlour. The doorway at the west end of the Dais was uncovered, and a circular stair constructed within the fifteenth-century Tower, to lead up to the thirteenth-century door into the Solar. The doorway into the Tower from the outside was opened up, and the original windows in the Tower have been uncovered and reglazed.

Originally the Hall had one large window in each bay, contained within its own gable. When the nineteenth-century stucco and brickwork were removed from the exterior, the outline of one gable was found almost intact, so that restoration of this and accurate reconstruction of the others could be made. The sill, one jamb and half the head of one east window were found, so that window has been restored; the other windows are new, but most probably in their correct positions.

Two of the original buttresses remained; these were repaired and restored and others built in their original positions. The Hall was built of Chilmark stone with flint walling, and now, nineteenth-century stucco having been removed, the walls are very much as they originally were, except for the minimum amount of repair work.

On the south (exterior) wall of the Undercroft are two ground level thirteenth-century windows; and in that wall there are good examples of thirteenth-century flint work. On the

north-east side of the Undercroft can be seen below a thirteenth-century window in the Solar, a fifteenth-century window which, when uncovered, contained some remnants of glass in the head. This window would presumably have been added when the east end of the Undercroft was made into a Parlour in the fifteenth century. In the nineteenth century the Solar was heightened and re-roofed, and it was extended at its west end.

The investigation and report of 1959 on the Old Deanery were carried out by Mr. N. Drinkwater and Mr. S. D. T. Spittle, both of the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England). Their findings were later confirmed by the Ancient Monuments Inspectorate of the Ministry of Public Building and Works. Plans were drawn up by Mr. C. Green of London, who is architect for the new buildings of the Training College, in conjunction with the above authorities.

The supervision of the reconstruction and restoration was carried out by Mr. Drinkwater, who was working in the Salisbury area. Much is owed to him for the care he gave to this work, and for his perseverance in overcoming diverse difficulties, so that now, in this very different twentieth century, it is possible to appreciate something of mediaeval craft and skill.

The writer wishes to acknowledge the help given by Mr. Drinkwater in writing this article.