

# The Landmark Trust

## THE WARDROBE, THE CATHEDRAL CLOSE, SALISBURY

The soldiers who garrisoned Castle of Old Sarum made life so difficult for the clergy that they petitioned the Pope in 1218, seeking his permission to move away. The Exodus took place a year later, down the hill to the Bishop's land by the river, the clergy followed by exactly 100 trusting citizens. The first stone of their new cathedral was laid on 28th April 1220, and with astonishing speed it was all but finished by 1258. Around it, the canons built houses, and outside the Close, the town of Salisbury grew equally rapidly, thriving on the wealth of the wool trade.

Unlike a monastic Chapter where the monks would live communally, the Salisbury Chapter was secular and the houses that the canons had built around the Close belonged to them. The problem of later monks having to buy a property was solved in the 14th century by sale or gift of most of them to the Dean and Chapter. Some were left specifically to the Bishop, and the Wardrobe was one of these.

In the early Middle Ages a wardrobe was a place for storing clothes, and other non-perishable objects such as books, relics, armour, spices and candles. It grew in the 13th century to encompass the whole department which dealt with the purchase of such things and the making up of clothes, an organisation of considerable size and complexity. On the social scale, a Bishop ranked as the equal of an earl. His household would have included priests, clerks and servants, as well as young men from noble families and promising young scholars. Outside this circle there were liveried bailiffs, assistants, and retainers. A high-ranking priest, known as the Keeper or Wardrober, would have overseen all the different functions.

Medieval Bishops constantly travelled and the Bishop's Wardrobe would have travelled with him, visiting the different manors each with their wardrobe chambers, often heated so that the tailor and embroiderer could keep their fingers warm. The Wardrobe in Salisbury would have acted as the store for more bulky items and for receiving cloth in manorial dues. Large chambers were required, as well as living quarters for the Keeper. This ties in with the building history, as revealed by the restoration work carried out in 1979. This showed that the existing building dates back to late 14th century, when it probably comprised a central aisled hall, with cross wings at the north and south ends.

In the mid-16th century, Salisbury received a reforming Bishop, John Jewell, who decreed the smashing of the idolatrous stained glass. Having no need of the Glass-house next to his Palace, he moved the Wardrobe into it instead. The Reformation reduced the number of canons, and in 1569 the hall and south wing were leased to the Chapter Clerk, who later leased the north cross-wing as well. By 1633, at a time when laymen were increasingly moving into the Close, the building passed to Sir John Croke, a local gentleman.

He set about restoring and improving the house, principally by flooring over the medieval hall to create a Great Chamber on the first floor, with deep cornices, large mullioned and transomed windows and a wide fireplace. A staircase was fitted into the angle between the south wing and the central block, which, with its decorative balustrade, leads up to the Landmark flat.

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The Commonwealth years saw the Close at its lowest ebb, the houses neglected and mostly empty, the graveyard a meat market and rubbish dump, frequented by the insalubrious regulars of the numerous taverns. The Wardrobe, thanks to the work of the Crooke family, escaped ruination, but other houses were in dire need of the great rebuilding of the late 17th and early 18th centuries that was to give the Close the face for which it is so rightly treasured.

In the 18th century further alterations and improvements were made, including the fine set of rooms on the garden front. The hall became a dining room with a drawing room in the south wing, and the Great Chamber was divided up into bedrooms. The gatehouse that had stood to the east of the house for several centuries was finally demolished in 1807. The Wardrobe saw little change in the 19th century, except modernisation of the kitchens and the addition of extra service rooms to the north. It was James Hussey's daughter, Margaret, who left toys and exercise books to be found by our builders in the backs of cupboards and under the floorboards.

In 1939, the War Office took over the Wardrobe and it became a base for the Auxiliary Territorial Services until 1945. It then became a hostel for the expanding Diocesan Training College for Schoolmistresses until 1969. After that, it remained empty and deteriorated until 1979 when it was arranged that the Landmark Trust would have the attics and the Duke of Edinburgh's Royal Regiment (Berkshire and Wiltshire) the rest as its headquarters.

The size and plan of the Wardrobe made it ideally suited to multiple occupation, accommodating a Landmark flat, museum, curator's flat, and administrative offices and social rooms for the Regiment. More than one entrance was obviously needed for all these uses, and the solution was to open up the two sides of the 1820's porch so that in one direction it gave onto the 17th century staircase.

Structural problems in the south wing had to be dealt with as the ends of the main beams had rotted away. The roof, which had been altered so many times that some vital timbers were missing entirely, was near to collapse and had to be stripped and repaired. The north wall was bulging and showing cracks, necessitating much work. Once these problems had been sorted out work on the interior was straightforward, though extensive. Circulation had to be improved, the partitions of the Great Chamber were removed, the great fireplace restored and the windows unblocked.

The Landmark flat presented more problems as the floor needed strengthening. Steel joists had to be inserted, which raised the floor by one foot, which had the advantage of improving the views out of the sitting room windows. In the bedrooms the old floors have been kept, but the sitting room has a new deal floor of specially cut wide boards. Furthermore the flat was not light enough, and the kitchen and bathroom had no windows at all. In the sitting room a new dormer was built, giving a view of the cathedral. By using old tiles, and in giving a point of emphasis to the large expanse of roof, it has turned out to be rather an improvement. Other windows were enlarged, and a small window was inserted into both the kitchen and bathroom.

Old doors were used throughout, and the stairs, of such lovely oak, were just rubbed down and waxed, after some judicious reinforcement from below. All the ceilings had to be replastered and the surfaces painted or papered. Those who stay in the Wardrobe can now enjoy one of the finest views in the country.

*The Landmark Trust is a building preservation charity that rescues historic buildings at risk and lets them for holidays. The Wardrobe sleeps up to 4 people. To book the building or any other Landmark property for a holiday, please contact us.*