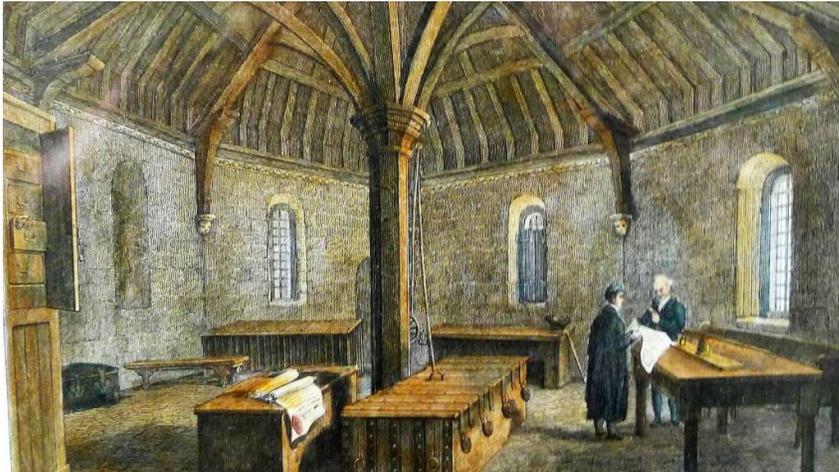


## ***The Changing Close: Landscape and Use Reflected in the Cathedral Archives***

This paper is a revised version of a talk given by Cathedral Archivist Emily Naish on the 16 February 2023 for the Close Preservation Society. The event was held at the Cathedral School, the old Bishop's Palace, and included a display of documents from the Cathedral Archive. Some of the documents are reproduced here. In preparation for this talk I am very grateful for the research of others on which I have drawn, particularly that of Tim Tatton-Brown and the authors of the RCHME volume 'The Houses of the Close' published in 1993.

The Cathedral Archive holds mostly unpublished documents created as a result of the Cathedrals' various activities over many centuries. The earliest document is from 1136 and today the collection includes digital documents. There are official records such as committee minutes, accounts, property records, and more ephemeral, unofficial records – photographs, leaflets, oral history recordings and some personal items donated by individuals. We are trying now to collect more of these personal items which reflect the experiences of different groups of the Cathedral community – worshippers, volunteers, and visitors - as a balance to the large number of official records.



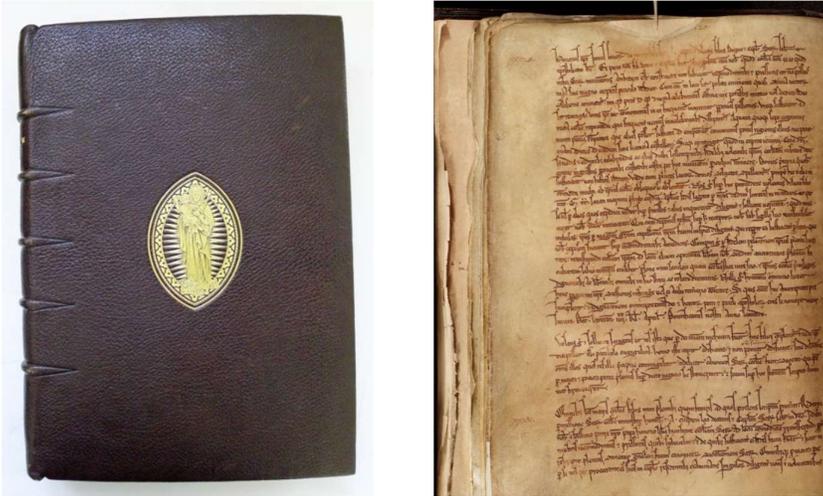
***The 13th century muniment room in a 19<sup>th</sup> century print. This room now used by the Cathedral choir.***

From the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century until the early 1970s the archives, or muniments as they were traditionally called, were stored in a purpose-built room above the vestry. The room has heavily barred narrow windows and numerous lockable doors indicating the value of the items stored within. In the early 1970s the muniment room was converted into the choir practice room but since then the archive collection has itself become very closely associated with the Close. Initially the archives were transferred to Wren Hall on choristers' green, then a sub-branch of the county record office. Later, circa 1980, they were moved to Number 6 The Close where the core part of the collection is still kept today.

Another significant collection of archives, those created during the last 40 years of the Cathedral's Major Repair Programme, was originally stored in the room about the Cathedral's north porch known as the Parvis Room. As the humidity in the Parvis Room was at times very high this collection was in recent years moved to another building in the Close. Although the archives are no longer kept in their original home in the Muniment Room we are fortunate that the collection is still on site

in the Cathedral Close. The archives of many other English Cathedrals have been deposited at their local county record office.

One of the archives' earliest treasures is a volume known as The Register of Saint Osmund.



***The Register of St Osmund has a twentieth century binding but the contents date from the 13<sup>th</sup> century and are written in Latin on parchment.***

This volume, technically called a cartulary, contains, possibly, the earliest reference to the area of land which was to become the Close. The reference is in an account written by Dean William de Wanda, of the Cathedral's move from Old Sarum. William de Wanda was Canon Precentor from 1218 and then Dean of Salisbury from 1220 to 1236 and so would have been thoroughly involved in the Cathedral's relocation and rebuilding. He writes: *'a plot of ground was by general approval agreed upon more commodious for the situation of the church, and proper for the assigning to each of the canons a fit space for the building of each a mansion house'*.

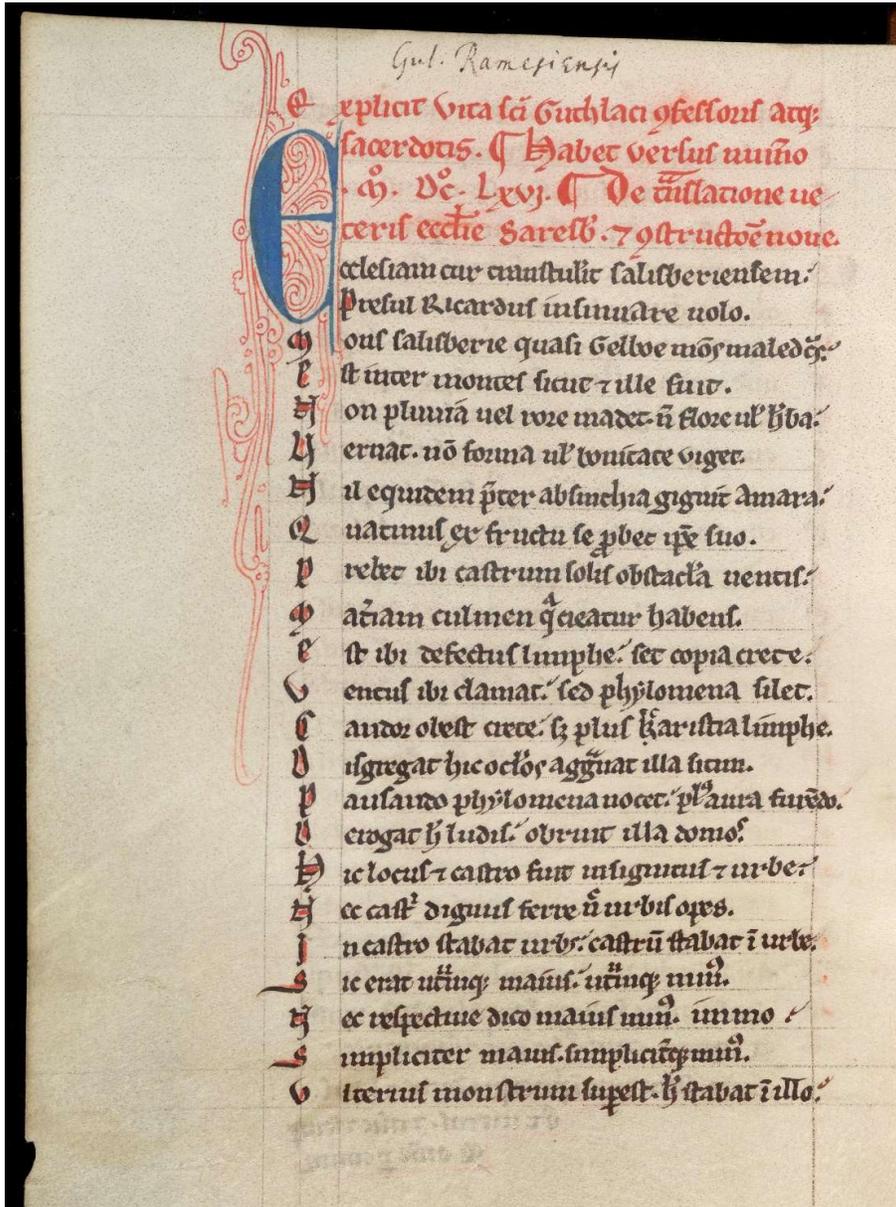
For a more elaborate description of the site of the future Close, we are indebted to the thirteenth century poet Henry of Avranches. Henry Avranches' position in the court of Henry III was probably not too dissimilar to that of a modern-day Poet Laureate and amongst the poems attributed to him is one, 210 lines long, called 'The Removal of the Old Church of Salisbury and the Construction of the New'. Unfortunately, for us, the poem is not held in the Cathedral archives but is part of a collection of Henry Avranches' poems, at Cambridge University Library.

The poem begins by describing the terrible conditions that the clergy endured at Old Sarum. Then the poet paints a picture of fertile meadow land teeming with the beauties of nature and abundant supply of food, water and timber:

*With great care a suitable site was sought for the new city and soon one was found. In a well-watered valley, rich in fruit trees as a wood, well suited for the hunters. Wild creatures will be plentiful in dense thickets. All sorts of trees grow there and all kinds of animals will be found... none of the animals were fierce, the hind was not afraid of the bear, nor did the stag fear the lion. In the orchards and meadows by the river-side birds were seen vying with one another in song – nightingale and lark, honey-birds and swans.*

*The church is being built alongside a spring, the waters of which surpass any other. Sparkling the waters flow, clearer than crystal, purer than gold, sweeter than ambrosia. Here the new church stands where someday the rushing stream will gladden a city and its people with an abundance of*

crops. Royal woods provide the timber, lovely flowers comfort the sick, the virtues of herbs will drive away all harm.<sup>1</sup>



*The first page of Henry Avranches' poem. (Cambridge University Library)*

Avranches finishes by describing the landscape with what maybe the highest possible compliment: *If Adam had come here when driven out of Paradise, he would have preferred exile to his native Eden.*

Of course, during the early period while the construction of the Cathedral was underway the Close would have been a hive of activity. However, work on many of the houses proceeded relatively slowly, probably because the canons themselves had to bear the expense of building their own homes. To speed things the Cathedral Chapter, at a meeting on 15 August 1222, decided that

<sup>1</sup> Translation by W J Torrance published in *The Wiltshire Archaeological & Natural History Magazine*, Vol LVII, Dec 1960.

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.

It was about 100 years later on 31 August 1327 that Edward III issued a licence to Chapter giving permission for a wall to be built around the Close. This licence still survives in the Cathedral archive and is in remarkably good condition.



**License issued by Edward III on 31 August 1327 for the building of the Close wall. The great seal at the bottom indicates his permission.**

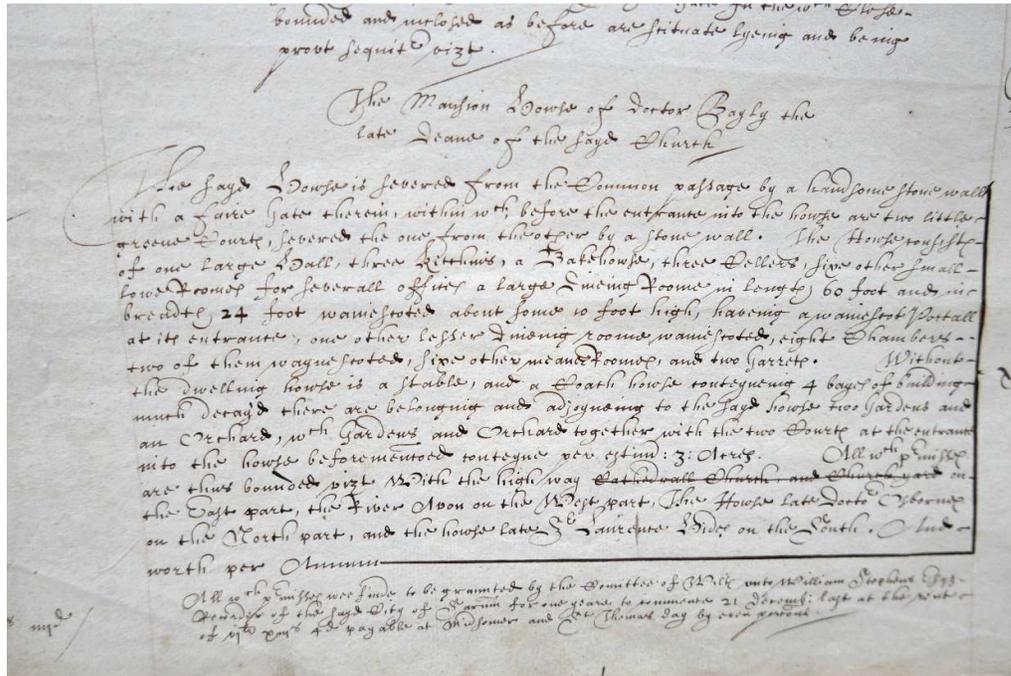
Before 1327 the boundary of the Close was mostly defined by the river Avon and a deep drain called the Close Ditch. The churchyard wall had already been built before work on the Close wall started. The churchyard wall is believed to have originally been nine feet high, but it was reduced in height in 1342 and the excess stone used for the Close wall (today the churchyard wall is about 2-3 feet high).

## The Close Houses

It is not my intention here to discuss the history of the Close houses in detail but rather to highlight some items in the archive which may be of particular interest relating to houses.

### **Parliamentary Surveys**

The Commonwealth period from 1649-1660 following the Civil War had a significant impact of the administration and running of the Cathedral and therefore the Close residents and their lives. Legal changes in the administrative structures and customs of all cathedrals included the abolition of deans, chapters, vicars choral, and choristers in 1648, and was followed in 1649 by the 'Act for the Sale of Deans' and Chapters' Lands'. In 1649 Parliament ordered a survey of the property belonging to Salisbury's dean and chapter. The survey returns survive in the archive and provide a glimpse of the general appearance of the Close in 1649 as well as details of the rooms and facilities in the houses. The survey also tells us that the Dean owned the grazing rights to 24 acres of the churchyard and could let it to who he pleased. All the trees growing in the Close were reserved for the use of the fabric and the pastures at the south end were used for an annual sheep and cattle fairs.



### ***The beginning of the survey return for the mansion house previously occupied by Dean Dr Bayley.***

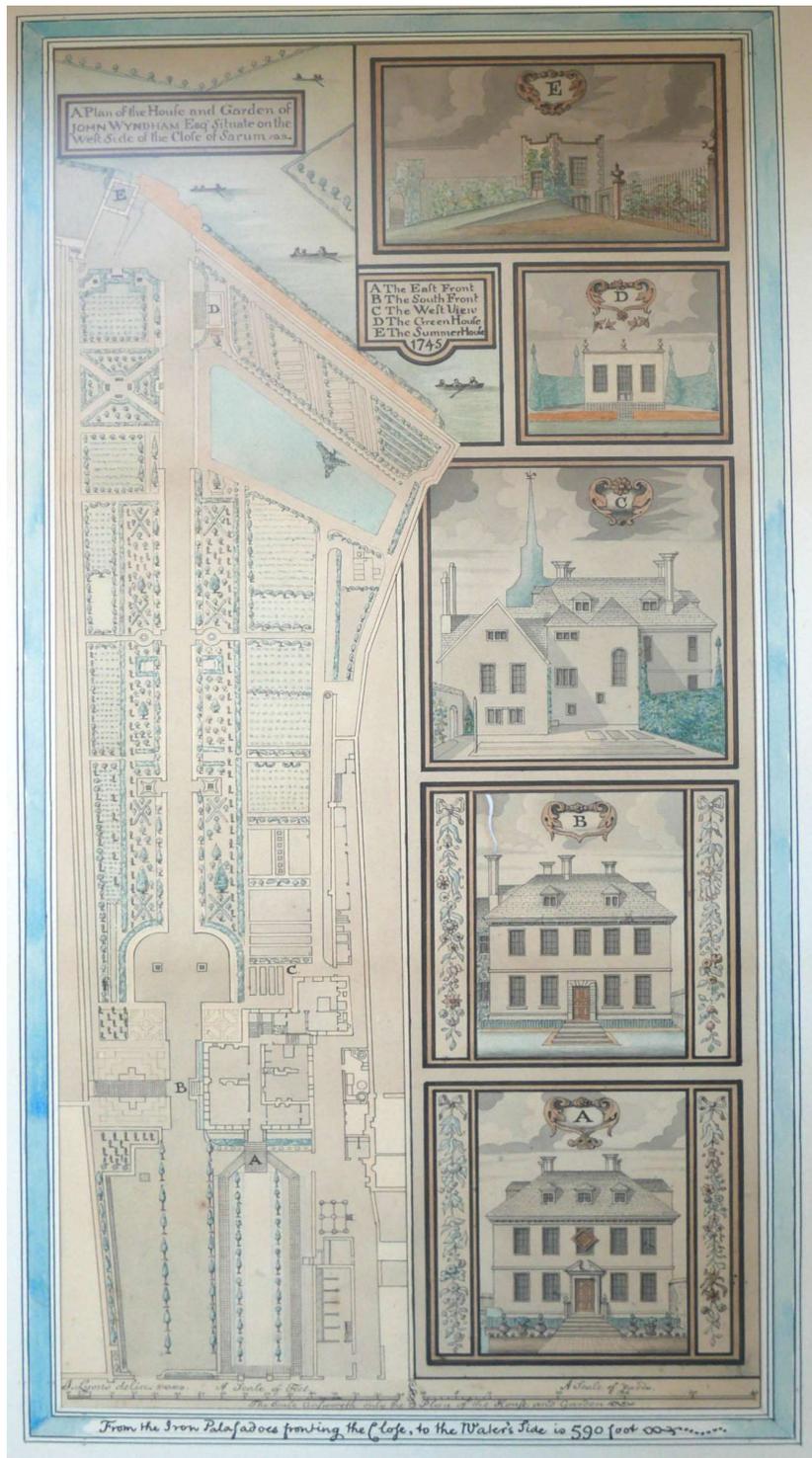
Dr Bailey was reinstated as Dean following the restoration and it was probably he who restored the house at a cost of £475 in 1670. Dr Bayley's house is describe as having one large hall, three kitchens, a bakehouse, three cellars, six other small low rooms for several offices, a large dining room 60 by 24 ft, a lesser dining room, 14 other rooms, two garrets, stable and coach house.

**Leadenhall.** One of the first houses, and built on a plot assigned to Elias de Dereham, the roof of the house was made of lead and has given the property its name. The present building dates from the early eighteenth century and the nineteenth century. The original medieval house was made of flint rubble and stone with tall windows. Some of the medieval fragments survived into the 20<sup>th</sup> century but unfortunately were demolished in 1915.

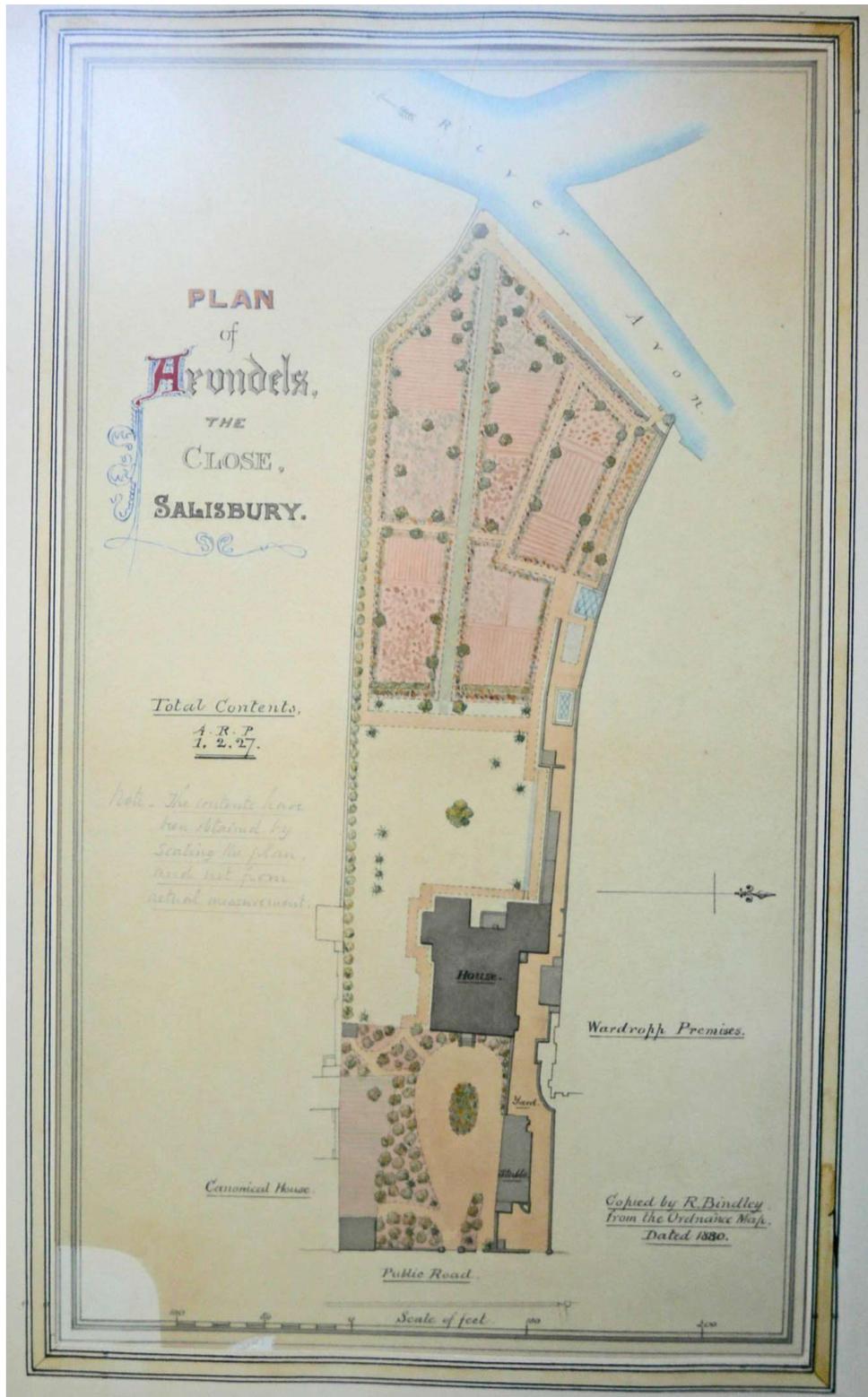


*Medieval remains of Leaden Hall c1910 photographed before demolition.*

## Arundells

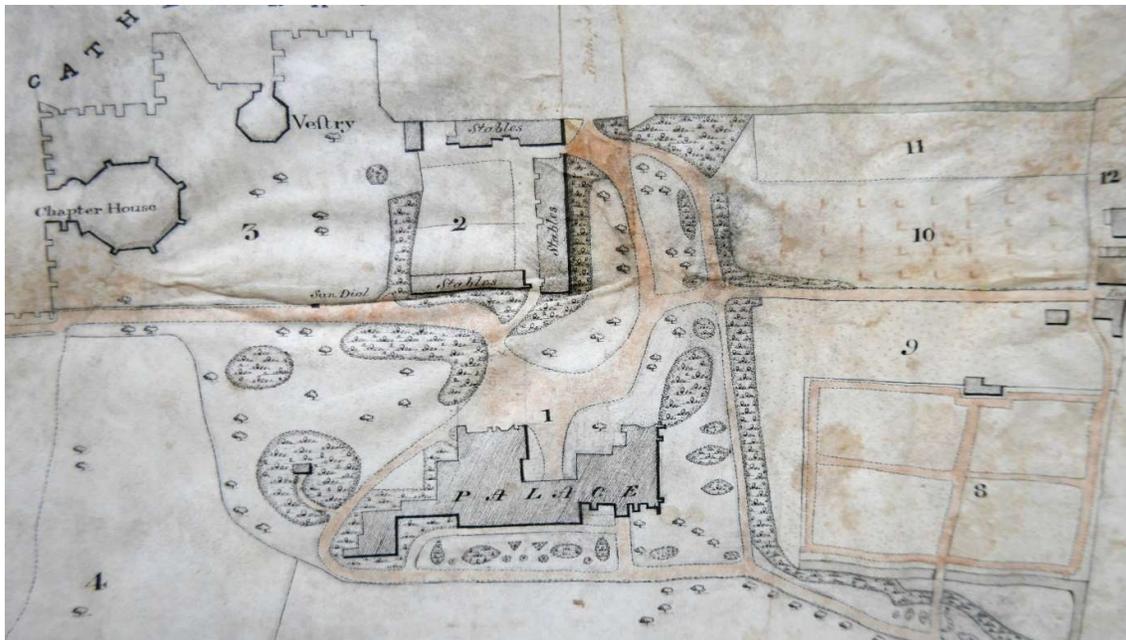
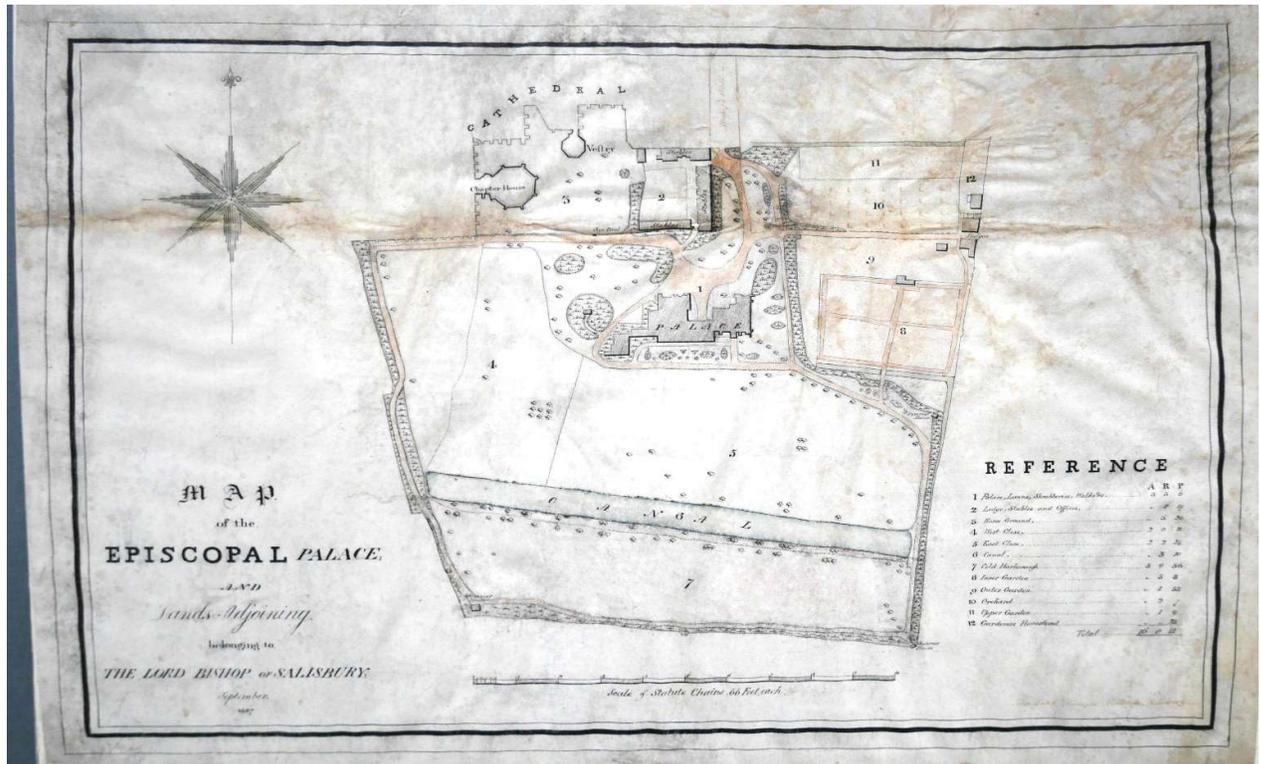


House and Garden of John Wyndham 1745, of the house and garden layout designed by John Lyons in circa 1720. The summer house (E on the plan) still exists on a plot of ground overlooking the junction of the Avon and Nadder.



**A later plan of the Arundells 'Copied by R Bindley from the Ordnance Map Dated 1880'.**

## The Bishop's Palace (The Cathedral School)



**A map of the episcopal palace and lands adjoining belonging to the Lord Bishop of Salisbury September 1827.** The whole area measured 16 acres and 11 perches. On the south, the grounds extended down to a broad length of open water set in meadow land called 'The Canal'.

**Choristers' Photograph Album** The following photos are taken from a photograph album compiled by headmaster of the choristers' school Reverend Robertson between circa 1900 and the 1920s.



*A PE lesson with Wren Hall (Number 56 The Close), the choristers' school, in the background.*



*In the garden at the front of Wren Hall with Mompesson House in the background.*



*A bike ride to Coombe Bissett starting at Harnham Gate.*

### **Changes in the 1790s**

The Close landscape was significantly altered in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century by changes, to both the Cathedral and surrounding churchyard, proposed by architect James Wyatt and enacted by both Wyatt and Bishop Shute Barrington. The Hungerford and Beauchamp chantry chapels either side of the Cathedral's east end were demolished.



*Print by T Hearne showing the two chantry chapels and published by W Byrne in 1798*

The remains of the medieval belltower were also demolished.



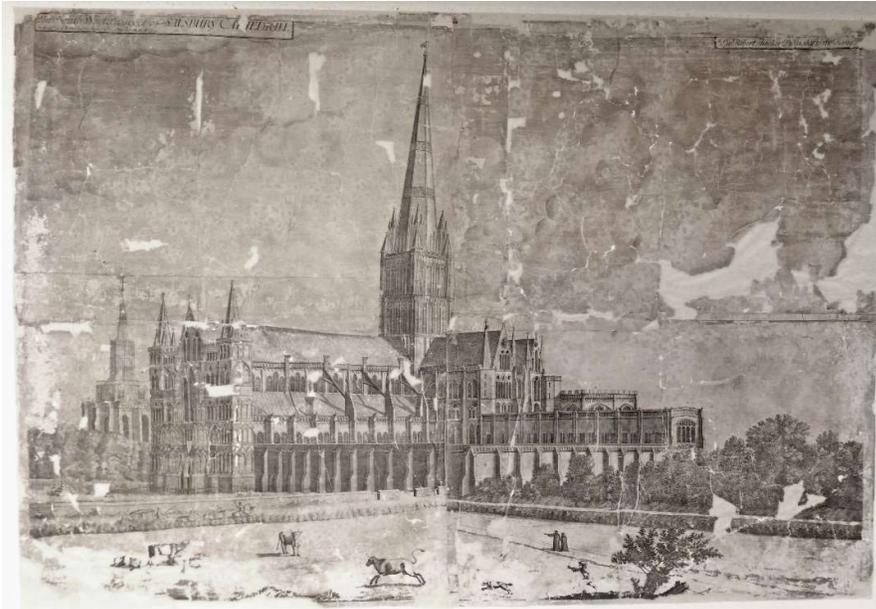
***A Northeast Perspective View of the (belfry) Cathedral Church and Close of Sarum, 1759***

The archive holds the research compiled in 1917 by J R Jerram a local bellringer and historian, which includes almost all that is today known about the belltower and the bells. The belltower was 33 feet square inside, the walls were the 8 foot thick and the whole structure stood about 80 feet high to the top of the parapet. Above the parapet was an oak bell chamber and above this an octagonal turret finishing with a short timber spire with a cross and weathercock on top. In 1769 the oak timbers had rotted to such an extent that the spire and the octagon were pulled down. In 1777 five of the eight bells were sold because they were cracked. In 1787, the decision was made to demolish the remainder of the bell tower. In March 1790 what had been the sixth bell was moved to the Cathedral spire and from then onwards has been used as to strike the hours for the clock. Jerram in his account rather poignantly describes this one surviving bell striking the hour *as daily morning the loss of her departed sisters*.

Another major change which took place in the 1790s was the levelling and grassing over of the churchyard. This was considered necessary due to the state of the churchyard as described by verger and historian William Dodsworth in his 1814 history of the Cathedral:

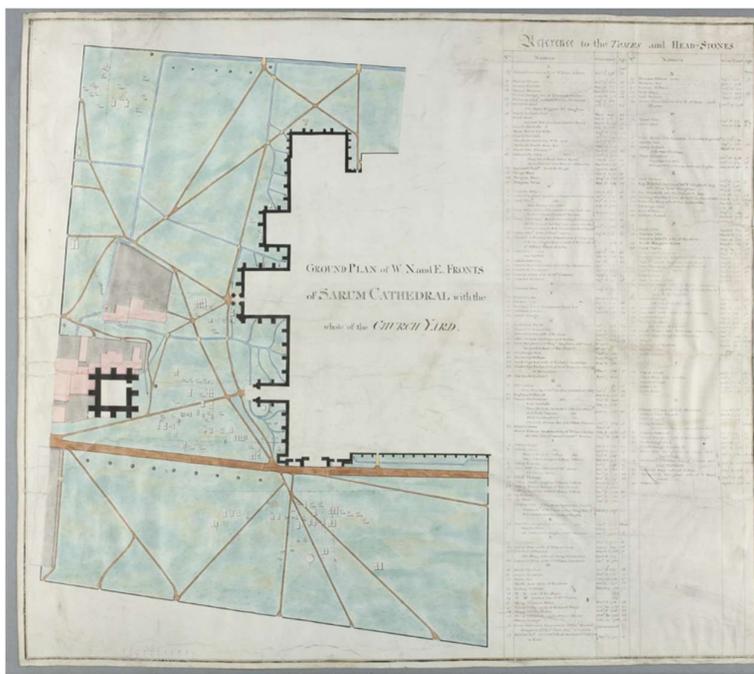
*The church yard itself was in the most unsightly, not to say disgusting, state. The avenues were indifferent, and after heavy rains difficult to pass; for the water which was conveyed from the roofs ran along open gutters into a large ditch which traversed the church yard, where, in dry seasons, it stagnated and became extremely offensive.*

A visitor to the Close in 1782 describes the churchyard as being like a cow-common, as dirty and neglected, and thro' the centre stagnates a boggy ditch. I wonder that the residents do not subscribe to plant neat, and rowl the walks, and cleanse the ditch which might be made a handsome canal.



**Possibly the oldest known image of the Cathedral, an engraving by R Thacker c1675. On the right the original full extent of the library above the east cloister is shown and the belltower with its timber and lead covered spire is visible on the left. Cows appear to be frolicking in the churchyard in the foreground.**

Before work on the churchyard started the Dean and Chapter ordered, in September 1786, a survey to be made showing the location of the graves and recording the inscriptions on the gravestones, as well as showing the paths and drainage channels.



**1786 survey of the churchyard, a close up of the area around the belltower is shown below.**



In his history William Dodsworth also describes the improvements made:

*Accordingly, a new circular underground drain was formed, three feet in diameter, which runs from the west to the east end, and receives all the water from the north side of the church. The ground itself was raise and levelled, and spacious gravel walks were made to the principal entrances.*

### **Trees in the Close**

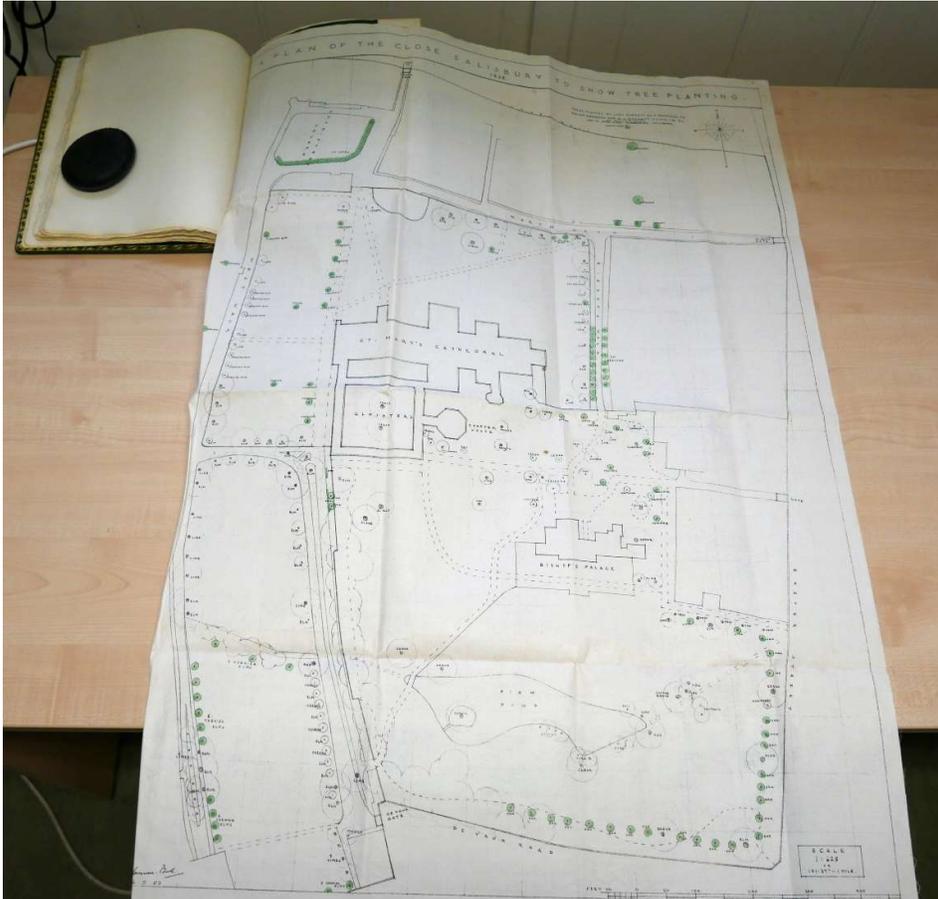
Possibly the earliest reliable evidence of the approximate location of trees are William Naish's maps of 1716 and 1751. There are also occasional references in the archive fabric accounts in a series of receipts and invoices kept by the Clerk of Works. From these we know, for example, that on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1823 14 fine Cornish Elms and 1 lime were planted at a cost of £1 17s 6d. Nine large English elms were planted on 8 March 1838 and in February and March 1842 two men spent three days planting 1200 fine thorns, 11 hollies and 36 box trees. Unfortunately, there is no mention of where the trees were planted.



This photograph was taken around 1917 near the West Front looking towards the path leading to the High Street (North) Gate. The trees were traditionally known as the Waterloo Elms as they were purportedly planted at the time of the Battle of Waterloo in 1815 but no documentary evidence to support this has been discovered. Many, if not all, of the elms in the Close succumbed to Dutch Elm disease and were felled in the 1970s. Some of the timber was later used in the early 1980s for new bookshelves in the Cathedral Library.

Few official records of tree planting appear to be have been kept. An exception is a scheme implemented between 1952 and 1958 by Lady Everett in memory of her husband. In the archive

record Lady Everett writes: *As the tree-lover wanders around the Close or cloisters he ponders on the age of the trees and on the men who planted them in by-gone ages. No record exists. It seemed fitting therefore in this record of the Trees planted between 1952 and 1958 in memory of Sir Henry Everett, to give some account of the planning and the planting of the trees.* Up to 1958 169 trees had been planted. Included in the volume is a map of the Close showing the location of the newly planted trees.



As well as documents preserved in the Cathedral Archives the diaries and memoirs of people living, working and visiting the Close are also a rich source of material to help us imagine what life was like in the Close in the past. Edith Olivier, living at No 20, described in her diary the flood of January 1915 as viewed from her window: *One morning we looked out from our windows in the Close to see the walls of the Cathedral rising out of the waters of a great lake, which covered the whole of the lawn. The effect was magical. The level grass in Salisbury Close has a far-famed beauty, but this was like something in a dream, or read of in a poem.*<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Olivier, Edith, *Without Knowing Mr Walkley*, 1938, Faber and Faber Limited, London



**Two photographs from the choristers' album of the 1915 flood.**

Finally, two extracts from a diary that William Small kept in 1881. William Small worked as a painter and glazier. His great uncle was a verger and proprietor of a school at Number 27.

*The Whitsun fair was held in the field, at the Back, where there were booths, shows, and Punch & Judy. Curds sold under the trees. Beer sold under the Cathedral Walls, & the Horse fair, in the Road by the Deanery.*

William describes the Close near Harnham Gate: *Mrs Truckle, Mrs Woodyear & Mr Charles Brown, 50 years ago and before, used to live in the three houses at the bottom of the Close, near the Gate. Mrs Truckle used to travel the country with haberdashery etc. She had a grey pony & trap. The pony used to feed in the Close by the side of the Road. Mrs Woodyear & her daughter Martha lived in the corner house under a stately Elm tree, that grew there, but long since cut down, she used to keep a Nightingale in a Cage outside her front Door. The Close was quite different then from what it is now, wild thorn & elderhedges in a wild state, a great many large trees about, from what there is now. The grass was laid up for hay & Farmer Drake of Netherhampton, used to bring his wagons in, and cart it away. In 1836 or 1837 there was a very high wind in January I think, and blew down all the stately Elm trees on one side of the walk (called Lovers Walk) but one, prostrate across the field, then the same year the present young ones were planted, and likewise those on the right hand of the road, going towards the Cathedral. I have often seen fish when a boy in the small stream that used to run down under the Close gate.*<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately the archives doesn't have a photo of Mrs Woodyear at Harnham Gate with her caged nightingale or of Farmer Drake of Netherhampton taking away the hay on his cart. But I'm going to share with you just one last photo – a wonderful late afternoon atmospheric scene in Bishop's Walk looking towards Bishop's Palace.



<sup>3</sup> William Small's diaries are deposited at the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, reference WSA 2713. The diaries, edited by Jane Howells and Ruth Newman, were published by the Wiltshire Record Society in 2011.