

Salisbury

Distance: 3.1 miles/ 5.1 km leisurely walking

In Pursuit of Spring: Chapter 4 *From Dunsbridge over Salisbury Plain*

Refreshments: Many pubs and eating places in the City

At the end of the walk: The Old Mill, Town Path, West Harnham, SP2 8EU

Map: Explorer 130

How to get there: Salisbury can be reached via South Western Railway's Waterloo and Exeter-St Davids line and on the Cardiff-Portsmouth Great Western Railway Line. From the station, walk through the Cathedral Close and out through the south gate – the Harnham gate – to Harnham Bridge from where the walk can be started.

If driving, park in Harnham Recreation Ground at the east end of a small stretch of dual carriageway on the A3094.

After Dean Hill and Alderbury *on the hilltop overlooking the Avon*, Edward Thomas cycled downhill and began *to slant nearer and nearer the river. The hedges of the road guided my eyes straight to the cathedral spire of Salisbury, two or three miles off before me... Over beyond the river the land swelled up into chalk hills, here smooth and green, with a clump on the ridge, and there wooded. The railway was now approaching the road from the right, and the narrow strip between road and railway was occupied by an old orchard and a large green chestnut tree. In the branches of the chestnut tree sang a chaffinch, while a boy was trimming swedes underneath. I was now at the suburban edge of Salisbury, the villas looking out of their trees and lemon-coloured barberry at the double stream of the Avon, at the willowy marshland, the cathedral, and the Harnham Down racecourse above.*

Salisbury, set in a chalkland valley and copiously watered by the Avon, Nadder, Ebbles, Wylde and Bourne originated from Old Sarum, an ancient Iron Age site north of the city. It was begun in 1217 after the episcopal decision to relocate the cathedral from the old settlement. It became Wiltshire's largest city and in the 14th century Parliament met here three times. The city's multiple water courses supported many mills, essential to a thriving woollen industry. Drainage ditches and canals carried water through the increasingly cluttered streets which frequently became filled with sewage and detritus, making city evil-smelling. Its tumultuous history saw riots in the 15th century, in part due to poverty brought on by fluctuations in the wool market. It was caught up in the Civil War and later, in 1688, James II moved his army here to oppose the landing of William of Orange but retreated after the defection of his more able commanders. The city declined in the 18th century as the developing industrial revolution relocated the woollen industry to northern areas. The urban growth and prosperity of the Midlands and North bypassed Salisbury. It became unhealthy, suffered plague, small pox and cholera outbreaks. Improvements were undertaken after 1737 when the streets were paved and cleaned and lit by oil lamps. It revived with the coming of the railway after 1847 and today its main industry is tourism.



Harnham Ridge, Constable, Tate Britain

1. Go left on Harnham Road and, after passing All Saints Church and reaching the pedestrian crossing, go left down Harnham Road

2. Turn left onto St Nicholas Rd and Harnham Bridge (143:290).



Harnham Bridge, BM



Alderbury Workhouse, Coombe Rd

3. Continue forward, passing on the right both the Toll House and St Nicholas Hospital

4. Turn left along De Vaux Place

Pass between a row of early 19th century Regency thatched cottages and, on the left, a redbrick late Victorian terrace and then the 13– 16th century timber-framed Rose and Crown pub, one of Salisbury's oldest. Harnham predates Domesday. It is thought that chalk extracted from the side of Harnham Hill was used for the manufacture of lime putty mortar in the construction of the cathedral.

I crossed over Harnham bridge where the tiled roofs were so mossy, and I went up under that bank of sombre-shivering ivy just to look from where the roads branch to Downston, Blandford and Odstock. Southward nothing is to be seen except the workhouse and many miles of bare down and sheepfolds.

Northward the cathedral spire soars out of a city without hill, dominated on the right or east by Burroughs Hill, a low but decided bluff, behind which are the broad woods of Clarendon. The bridge, formerly Ayleswade or Ayleswater Bridge, was built by Bishop Bingham in 1244, originally in two sections with a chapel on an island in between. It was to counter the frequently flooding ford and to improve road access to the city. Its building, along with the earliest bridge at Fisherton, severely affected the fortunes of the earlier and more powerful neighbouring town of Wilton, as goods and traffic surged into Salisbury and its markets. The bridge was widened in 1774. Its toll house taxes were used to for repair and maintenance.

The Hospital dates back to the 13th century and was for the service of the indigent sick and travellers. It inspired Anthony Trollope's novel *The Warden* and continues as Diocesan almshouses.

The road sweeps right under the 1327 walls of the Cathedral Close, built partly from stone cannibalised from Old Sarum and having five gates. This was the site of a 1262 house for poor theology scholars known as the House of the Valley of Scholars of Blessed Nicholas. Unable to confer degrees, its students were sent to Oxford. In its early years, with its



Harnham Gate to the Close, BM

5. Enter the Cathedral Close through the arched 13th century Harnham or South Gate and turn right, walking down Broad Walk.



King's House/College/Museum, BM



Arundells, BM

6. Passing the yew trees, go right through the Visitors' entrance into the Cathedral.



The Cathedral nave

clerical foundations and colleges, it was claimed that Salisbury was almost a university. The college, known as De Vaux College, was dissolved in 1542 and demolished in the 19th century, though some elements remain in the houses along this lane.

The Close of 83 acres is Britain's largest Cathedral close. At the Cathedral's planning stages, the canons were given over an acre of ground on which to build their homes. The Dean and others in the hierarchy had three acres.

Over to the left is the 1720 three storeyed redbrick Walton Canonry. Artist Rex Whistler, who did much work in Wiltshire, leased it from 1938 until his death on the Caen Salient of the Normandy invasion in 1944.

Further along, the city Museum incorporates the King's House which became the Church of England National Society's College of Sarum St Michael, a women's teacher training college. Thomas Hardy's sisters Mary and Katherine attended it. He uses it, *a species of nunnery*, as Sue Bridehead's training college in *Jude the Obscure*. Jude comes to Salisbury (Melchester) to work as a stonemason at the Cathedral while hoping to be ordained. Nearby is Arundells, a 13th century house, its frontage modified by owner John Wyndham in the 18th century. Its decline after use as a school, was arrested after 1964 and it was bought in 1985 by Edward Heath, former Prime Minister. It has a fine art collection and is open to the public.

The Cathedral has impact as a gracious and uncluttered interior. Johnson called it *the last perfection in architecture*.

The 449 ft/135m long cathedral was begun in 1220, contemporaneously with the removal of the city of Old Sarum to its new site. It is built on a well-drained gravel terrace situated just above the alluvium of the river valley. With stone sourced from the old cathedral and sedimentary limestone predominantly from the Chilmark, Tisbury and Chicks Grove quarries, it was completed in 1258, with the cloisters, chapter house and spire (404 ft / 123 metres) being added between 1310 – 1330. Thomas indulged his talent for selecting unusual monuments, ignoring some of the



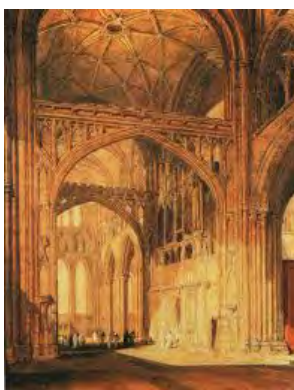
The Seymour monument



'... old Eleanor Sadler' BM



Intimations of Rags, BM



Looking towards the North Transept,
Turner

more magnificent such as that to Edward Seymour, nephew of Jane Seymour, and his wife, Lady Catherine Grey, sister of Lady Jane Grey. Thomas *went up and down those streets of knights', ladies', and doctors' tombs*, those who had played significant roles in the history of Salisbury and the kingdom.

Characteristically, he ignores them all. He selects four. On the west end wall, to the left as one enters, is the memorial to **Thomas, Baron Wyndham, Lord High Steward of Ireland (1681- 1745)** who, his biography states, was so conscientious and unremitting in his judicial duties that he took early retirement owing to broken health.

On the south wall is the elegant tablet to Henrici Hele MD. Faithfully translating its script, Thomas says he *practised medicine felicitously and honourably, for fifty years, in the close and in the city*. The scribe omits to mention that he signed a certificate of lunacy in a plot to incarcerate a woman in an asylum, for which infelicitous and dishonourable act he was brought before a grand jury. Further on is the memorial to *old Eleanor Sadler, grim, black, and religious, kneeling at her book in a niche since 1622, and looking as if she could have been the devil to those who did not do likewise*. She was the widow of Thomas Sadler, Registrar under six bishops, lived in the King's House in the Close where James I and his wife Anne of Denmark were entertained. In his 1912 Fieldwork Book 53 (Berg Collection), Thomas notes, *A knight lying w[ith] feet just on back of dog who raises his head in slight resentment as Rags does. Some initials thinly scratched on the knight's cuisses + c.*

Walking down to the crossing and glancing over to the North Transept, the seated white marble statue of Sir Richard Colt Hoare (1758-1838), the Wiltshire antiquary and archaeologist, can be seen against the north wall. He commissioned the young Turner to execute various works relating to Salisbury and its neighbourhood. Between 1801 and 1805 the artist worked on the complex image of the *Interior of Salisbury Cathedral, Looking towards the North Transept*. Edward Thomas was familiar with and often cites the works of Colt Hoare.

A walk over the crossing brings one on the left to the bust of the magnificently bearded Richard Jefferies (1848 – 1887). From an early age Thomas admired his writings, explored his



Richard Jefferies' monument



George Herbert

7. Turn right and take the diagonal path along the north side of the Cathedral which travels across the Close and up to Sarum College.

Wiltshire environment and later wrote a distinguished biography of this influential mentor whom he never met. The inscription says, he had observed, *“the works of Almighty God, with a poet’s eye [and] enriched the literature of his country and won for himself a place amongst those who have made men happier and wiser”*. Thomas comments, *If Jefferies had to be commemorated in a cathedral, it was unnecessary to drag in Almighty God. Perhaps the commemorator hoped thus to cast a halo over the man and his books: but I think “The Story of my Heart” and “Hours of Spring” will be proof against the holy water of these feeble and ill divided words.*

There is much else to see in the Cathedral, including the *Prisoners of Conscience Window* commissioned in 1979 and unveiled the following year by Yehudi Menuhin. The striking blues, purples and magentas, offset with flaming crimson and flashes of yellow and green, remember those who have followed their moral conscience in resisting war and violence. It was designed and created by Gabriel Loire and his son, Jacques – in their Chartres workshop. A glass prism commemorates artist Rex Whistler, killed as a tank commander in Normandy. It was engraved by his brother Laurence, who also created the memorial window to Edward Thomas in Steep Church. The iron-framed clock (1386) is claimed (and disputed) to be the oldest working clock in the world. The best-preserved of the four remaining copies of Magna Carta is housed in the Chapter House.

On leaving the Cathedral, the 2008 statue of George Herbert (1593 –1633), the clergyman and metaphysical poet, can be seen on the south return of the west front. Thomas cycles past his small Church of St Andrew at Bemerton (where Herbert is interred under the altar) on his way up to Salisbury Plain.

Having breakfasted on the Sunday morning of his arrival, Thomas *was soon out again, this time amid jackdaws, rooks, clergy and the black-dressed Sunday procession, diversified by women in violet, green and curry colour... The people kept to the paths of the close. The lawns and trees were given over exclusively to the birds, especially those that are black, such as the rook and blackbird. Those that were not matrimonially engaged on the grass were cawing in the elms, beeches, and chestnuts of*



St Anne's Gate, BM

the cathedral. Missel-thrushes were singing across the close as if it had been empty. A lark from the fields without drifted singing over the city. The stock-doves cooed among the carved saints. There were more birds than men in Salisbury. Never had I seen the cathedral more beautiful. The simple form of the whole must have been struck out of glaucous rock at one divine stroke. It seemed to belong to the birds that flew about it and lodged so naturally in the high places. The men who crawled in at the doors, as into mines, could not be masters of such a vision.

8. Walk right along North Walk.

On the right is Bishop Wordsworth's School and Language College. A blue plaque commemorates Nobel Prize-winning novelist, poet and playwright William Golding (1911 – 1993) who taught at the school from 1945 – 1962.

9. Go through St Anne's Gate (Handel stayed in a room above it) to St John Street.

Walk left along St John's St and Catherine St, crossing New St.

The streets being shuttered and curtained, robbed of the crowd shopping, were cold and naked; even the inns of Salisbury, whose names are so genial and succulent – Haunch of Venison, Round of Beef, Ox, Royal George, Roebuck, Woolpack – were as near as possible dismal.

10. Cross over Milford St (The Round of Beef, closed in 1928 and now devoted to retail, was situated at no. 19) and on to Queen St.

The Market Place is on the left. At its north-eastern corner, turn right along Winchester St. Cross over Rollestone St and at the next cross roads, turn left along St Edmund's Church St. Cross Bedwin St into the St Edmund's churchyard

Here Thomas surveyed gravestone names. The memorials have been tidied up and only altar tombs remain. The 13th century church with a 17th century tower has housed Salisbury Arts Centre since 1975. It had originally been envisaged as part of the city's projected university.

11. Leave the churchyard and walk right down Bedwin St, passing Frowd's Almshouses (a charity supporting mental health patients integrate within the community) and the Royal George pub.

Turn left down Endless St – Thomas's Woolpack, was at No 8 – until the north side of Market Place is reached. Turn right.

The Duchess of Salisbury on the south side incorporates Thomas's Ox Inn which faced on to Ox Row on Butcher Row and closed in 1924. The Roebuck, also on Butcher Row, was demolished and was replaced by shops. Ahead, with a three-arched façade is the site of the Old Market House (now the location for the city library). From here Minster St runs north-south and the 14th century Haunch of Venison is down on the left. In 1320 records say it housed craftsmen building the cathedral spire.

12. Cut down to the left along St Thomas's Square where the lane leads to St Thomas Becket and St Edmund's church



Last Judgement fresco

This has a vivid wall painting of the Last Judgement. It was whitewashed in 1593 and was still hidden when Thomas Hardy used the church as the wedding venue of Sue Bridehead with the schoolmaster Richard Phillotson in *Jude the Obscure*. One can only conjecture how Hardy might have used this image of the Doom in his grimly tragic story. The painting merits examination – note the kings and bishops being dragged naked into the Mouth of Hell; only the short-changing alewife remains clothed. The church dates to the very foundation of New Sarum and has undergone many developments with a clerestory being added in the late 15th century.



St Thomas Becket Church, BM

13. Cross over to High St and right along Crane St



Church House, Crane St

Many of the brick-faced, tile-hung buildings in this street have 19th century facades but some are much earlier, even 13th century. Church House, the current diocesan administrative offices, is a 15th century house of three ranges, a three-bay hall and an undercroft. It was the city's workhouse till 1881. 1834 Poor Law Commissioners had complained they never seen *a more disgusting scene of filth and misrule than the Salisbury workhouse*.

14. Follow Crane St along the 15th century bridge over the Avon.

The four-arched Crane bridge is part of an earlier six-arch one. It is documented in 1300. It was widened in 1898 and leads on to **Mill Rd.**

15. Follow the curve of Mill Rd. At the landscaped semi-circle of Queen Elizabeth Gardens, enter the Water Meadows by crossing the low-arched wooden Long Bridge on the left.

This is the site of Constable's dramatic 1831 *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows*. 'I have no doubt of this picture being my best now', he wrote in July 1834. John Fisher, Bishop of Salisbury, a Suffolk man like the painter, was a generous patron to Constable who painted



and sketched around 300 images of the city and its surroundings.

The Nadder and the Avon girdle these water meadows. They are fed by an irrigation system of channels, ditches and sluice gates which enabled the meadows to be inundated by the chalk downland streams and suspended nutrients to be dispersed in the flooding over the 84 acres. They create an eco-climate, the water preventing the severest frosts, so encouraging early grass growth known as 'the early bite', helping feed animals through to the springtime. This technological wonder of the 18th century agrarian revolution still offers a managed and rich haven for flora and fauna. Of the dusk of an earlier visit, Thomas writes *the green river meadows and their elms and willows chilled and darkened as the gold sun sank without staining the high, pale-washed sky, and the cathedral clock nervously and quietly said, 'One-two, one-two, one-two' for the third quarter before dark.*

16. Go along the Town Path.



17. Go right and then left over the weir to the West Harnham Mill House and Old Mill Pub and Restaurant with its chequered gable end of stone and knapped flint.

The complex has been variously dated to an 1135 or the 14th century. It has been a paper-making mill, a fulling mill, a bone mill and a tallow-making mill. It has open timber framing, panelling, fine beam and stone work (note the squints by the entrance). The setting is dramatic, with the Nadder coursing over a weir. A bench plaque records the sad death of Susan Harris who, *while a trainee teacher at the College of Sarum St Michael, drowned here while saving another in March 1966.*



Old Mill Pub, BM

18. At the far side of The Old Mill, go through the barrier on the left which opens on to Harnham Recreation Ground and walk to the left of the houses and gardens projecting from the right into the grassy area. Turn right to the car park and the start point.

A fine view of The Old Mill and the weir on the River Nadder can be gained by looking back.

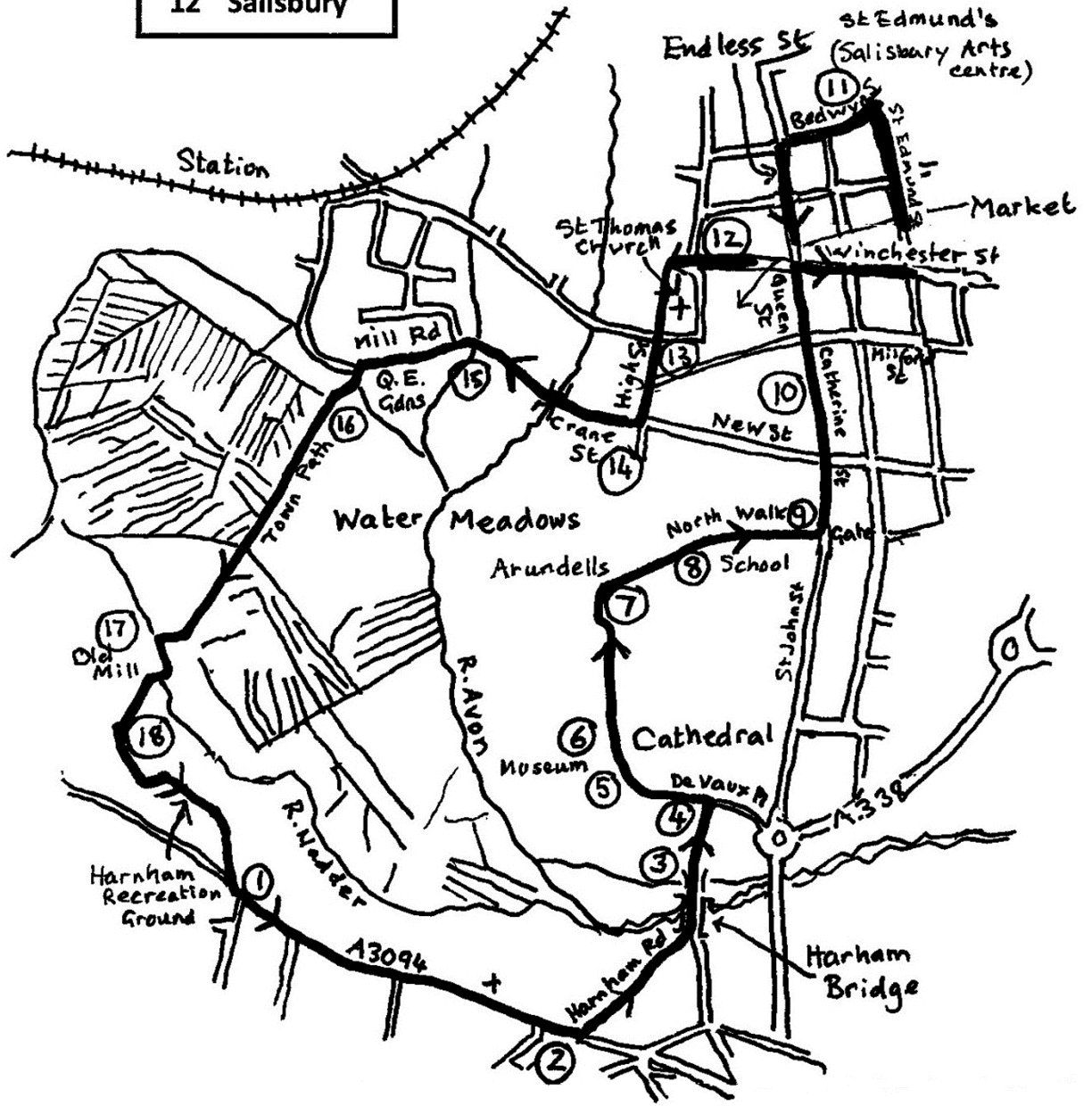


Further on the left can be seen a last glimpse of the cathedral over the Avon water meadows, a point where Constable painted *Salisbury Cathedral from the South-West* (Summer 1823).

With thanks to Sara Sawyer and Tim Parkinson, Edward Thomas Fellowship, Sally Peel, Salisbury Cathedral and Catherine Carberry

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Approximate scale: 1 mile