Salisbury and Wiltshire

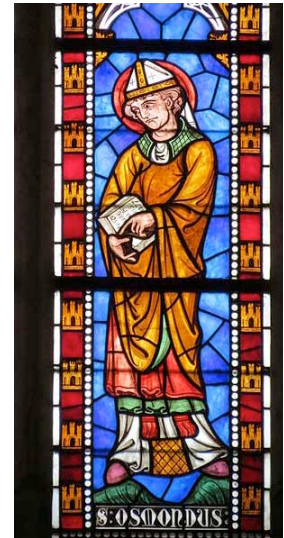Reationship of London to Salisbury

Above; Salisbury Plain with prehistoric Stonehenge. *Below:* Model of Old Sarum by John B. Thorp, London, 1927. The cathedral complex below the raised citadel covered a considerable portion of the site.

Prehistory of Wiltshire.

Before the Romans and Celts came to the great Salisbury Plain a prehistoric people who built Stonehenge, the ancient burial chamber at West Kennet Longbarrow, and the henge at Avesbury, inhabited it. They left other mysterious reminders of their presence including skeletal remains believed to date back some 5000 years.

Old Sarum (Caer-Saflog, Sorviodunum)

Although the Romans did not settle in the Salisbury Plain, Sorviodunum was an *oppidum*, or small town of Roman Britain and a market center. The Romans built roads here leading to Dorchester, Wilchester, Silchester, Bath, Jennet and Ilchester. The land seemed to have been primarily an agricultural area. After the Romans, in 522, the Celts fought a battle at Salisbury Hill and finally settled there around 1003. The Danes brought the town to its knees.

The Normans took an interest in the hill fort and around 1070 converted it to a motte-and-bailey castle. In August of 1085 William the Conqueror presided at a great convocation at Old Sarum attended by some 60,000 people. This could be seen as the introduction of the feudal system into England. The following year, the Domesday Book, a great catalogue of land and ownership of William's subjects was produced Another large gathering at Old Sarum was the occasion of the tournament between Sarum and Wilton.

Medieval Salisbury and the Cathedral

Old Sarum suffered along with the nation during the six-year interdict[1] imposed by Rome on England and Wales under the reign of King John as the result of a debate over the election of a replacement for the archbishop of Canterbury. Many bishops and clergy fled the country during a "reign of terror" prosecuted by the king's soldiers. There was such tension between the citadel and the cathedral that Peter de Blois[2] referred to the church of Sarum as "the captive on the hill."

Once Old Sarum came under the hands of the laity the removal of the cathedral to its present site was inevitable. The bishop established his new seat in 1217 and ten years later the new cathedral town of Salisbury received a charter.

Bishop Richard le Poore began construction of the cathedral in the early English gothic style in 1220. Old Sarum had its very own Saint—Osmund/Osmond. Count of Sées (d. 1099) Lord Chancellor (*ca* 1070-1078) and bishop of Salisbury, who built the first cathedral. His tomb was moved to the new cathedral in 1225. The cathedral was consecrated in 1258 after the completion of the choir, transepts and nave. The spire, of a completely different style, was added 1310-33. In the 18th century, James Wyatt made many controversial "restorations." In 1859 Sir George Gilbert Scott tried his hand at the work.

Commerce in Medieval Salisbury. By the middle of the 14th century Salisbury was center for wool production, much of the cloth was shipped through Southampton. This waned in the 17th century because the clothiers were unable or unwilling to meet the demands of changing fashion and competition from Spain. It remained a market town. Further challenges to progress were poor harvests in the 1620's, the plague of 1627 and the start of the Civil War in 1642. Even so, Salisbury was able to maintain a reputation for charity privately funded including a number of almshouses and an infirmary. There were agrarian riots in 1839 and the railway arrived in 1847. Tourism began with the construction of the cathedral and continues today as an important economic factor.
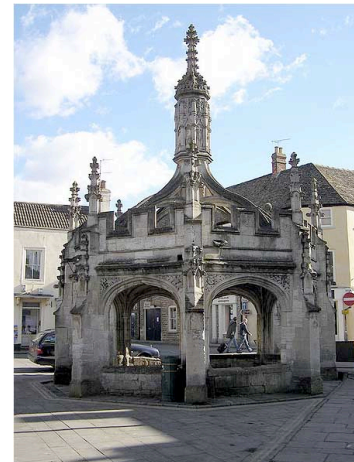
A medieval fuller from a carved bench end, Spaxton Church, Somerset.

Banqueting Hall of the Old George Inn. A portion of the old inn can be found atn the western end the Old George Mall. It dates from ca, 1364. H.G. Wells writes of it in *The Secret Places of the Heart*.

A Hospitable Town The diarist Samuel Pepys stayed at the very comfortable Old George Inn, but complained about the price for stabling his horses. (June 10-11, 1668). Oliver Cromwell spent an overnight there in 1645. Anthony Trollope visited in 1851 and later wrote that he conceived the idea for The Warden, the first of six novels about the fictional cathedral city of Barchester while touring Salisbury Cathedral. The Inn appears in Charles Dicken's "Martin Chuzzlewit". In his *Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain* published 1724-1727 Daniel Defoe wrote: "The city of Salisbury has two remarkable manufactures carried on in it, and which employ the poor of great part of the country round; namely, fine flannels, and long cloths for the Turkey trade, call'd Salisbury Whites: The people of Salisbury are gay and rich, and have a flourishing trade."

Wiltshire is not a one-town county. It is known as a ceremonial county, one to which a Lord Lieutenant is appointed. **Amesbury** (Avesbury) is known for its prehistoric henge (stone circles). **Malmesbury** is believed to be the oldest borough in England thanks to a 9th century charter from Alfred the Great. In the Middle Ages it was a center of learning in and around Malmesbury Abbey. It is a lovely town situated on a hill and surrounded at its base by the Bristol Avon River. Remains of Neolithic and Iron Age forts dating from 800-500 BC support the belief that this is the oldest continually inhabited town in Britain. **Marlbrough** is also old with signs of habitation from around 2400 BC. William the Conqueror built a castle here and set aside private hunting ground nearby. **Wilton** has 8th century Anglo-Saxon roots. A carpet industry began here in the 18th century and was succeeded by the famous Wilton Royal Carpet Company that began at the turn of the 20th century and lasted until 1995. For fans of Downton Abbey, Wiltshire has many great houses including Wilton and Longleat.

15th century market cross at Malmsbury, Wiltshire. Believed to be one of the finest examples of market crosses.

1. An interdict banned all religious services even Christian burial although Baptism and Viaticum (Last Communion) were permitted. 2 Peter de Blois (c. 1135 – c. 1211), French Poet and Diplomat