

This contains useful  
information (NB it is  
unedited)

# Text From Audio Tour Guide

(NB – this version was created May 2012 and you will see that there are notes relating to questions TBC which remain unanswered in this document)

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It is the only bishop's palace in Britain both still in use by its bishop and open to the public.

The Palace was built here because medieval bishops needed to be close to the Cathedral so called because it houses the bishop's 'cathedra' or throne.

But it was also built to be close to, and to enclose, the natural springs or 'wells' which give Wells its name, and which predate all of the buildings. As you'll discover today, it is this water which has fundamentally shaped the story of the Palace, its Bishops and Wells itself.

## **Gatehouse**

It's described as the Bishop's Palace, but many of the features of this site, like these crenelated walls and great bastions, make it feel more like a fortress.

Bishop Ralph of Shrewsbury was granted a special license from the King to construct the Palace defences in the 1340s. Like earls and barons, medieval Bishops were powerful lords and wealthy landowners.

So this gatehouse, the ramparts and the moat were not just practical defences, but a demonstration in stone of Bishop Ralph's power and status.

These were clear statements both of his authority in the wider kingdom – and over the townspeople of Wells.

## **Murder Holes and More**

If you were a medieval citizen of Wells with a serious grudge against your Bishop, you'd really need to think twice before attempting to storm his Palace.

Take the portcullis, for example. A heavy, spiked, iron gate which could be sent crashing down on attackers.

And in the upper floor of the gatehouse (now the caretakers' living room), just outside this little window, are the grooves where the original portcullis would have slid up and down. When the portcullis fell, it would trap attackers in front of a heavy inner door. In this confined space, they were at the mercy of the Palace guards. Under what is now this living room floor are the darkly titled 'murder holes', which you can still see from below. Through those rather decorative lion's mouths, guards could actually pour down boiling oil. At least, that was the theory – these warlike defences were clearly an effective deterrent, and none of the bishops have actually had to defend himself here.

## **Riot 1831**

The last time the drawbridge over the moat was raised was in 1831.

Bishop George Law feared that an angry mob of political protesters was about to wake sleepy Wells.

Already, rioters in Bristol had burned buildings there, including its Bishop's Palace, as a horrified local resident, Reverend Jackson recorded:

*'This morning an actual slaughter has taken place . . . about seventy persons have been killed, besides a large number who have been wounded. The military charged through some of the principal streets, cutting right and left . . . May God preserve us.'*<sup>1</sup> ( <sup>1</sup> Reverend J. L. Jackson, letters to C. B. Wollaston (31 Oct – 1 Nov 1831): cf. <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/PRbristol.htm> )

Bishop Law had good reason to worry, as such riots had broken out across the nation partly in anger against the Bishops. The House of Lords, including most of its Bishops (NB Bishop Law was well known as a strong opponent of the Bill.) had blocked the popular Reform Bill for a fairer electoral system. However, to his relief, the unrest didn't spread to Wells. The drawbridge was lowered, and has stayed down ever since.

### **Bishop Ralph's Palace**

Ralph of Shrewsbury (Bishop 1329–1363)

Here lies the pious and godly Ralph of Shrewsbury, entombed in Wells Cathedral. He lived in turbulent times, and he understood that it was his duty to defend the faith. This was more than a symbolic responsibility – Bishop Ralph fortified his Palace, and his authority, with stone defences.

During 1336<sup>2</sup> some of the clergy in Wells were physically attacked. Bishop Ralph had to act, to protect his people. (<sup>2</sup> This wording is deliberate as we cannot say that that one incident was the sole cause for Ralph's defences.)

Ralph commissioned new defences for the Palace – a stern gatehouse and these high crenellated walls. These provided real physical protection - they also stood as a powerful symbol of Ralph's spiritual authority.

Bishop Ralph went further: he created this moat, fed with water from the well springs which rose just outside the new walls.

From now on, the Bishop's petitioners and guests would have to cross the moat, and pass through a defended entrance. They could enter the palace only on the Bishop's terms. Ralph's ambitious project didn't just transform the Palace – it also set the Bishop apart from the unruly city.

### **Inner Courtyard**

Imagine this space in the early 1200s. We wouldn't be enclosed by walls, but in an open space – a low island of drier ground, in a valley floor criss-crossed by streams. On this island, out of the way of flooding, stood the new Palace built by Bishop Jocelin.

Today, we can still see part of the Jocelin's Palace from that time. The earliest surviving structure on the site, it's still at the heart of the modern Palace. And where Jocelin built big, his successors – the great medieval bishops of Bath and Wells – built bigger.

The most ambitious of them all was Bishop Robert Burnell, In the late 1200s - within just sixty years of Jocelin's project – he replaced the chapel with this larger, more magnificent and more fashionable building.

You are welcome to enter Burnell's chapel and Jocelin's Palace – the medieval core of the Palace. But if you're hoping to spot the current Bishop of Bath and Wells, look at the range of buildings to the left of the central block. This date from the days of Bishop Beckinton, in the mid 1400s, and it's where the current bishop lives and works – just like his medieval predecessors.

### **Bishop Jocelin's Palace**

Jocelin Trotman (Bishop 1206–1242)

Bishop Jocelin – a name that's been part of Wells history for eight hundred years. He was a builder, a politician, even perhaps a dragon-slayer. But there's no surviving portrait of Jocelin, as there are of other bishops - so we have to piece him together from just a few clues.

This manuscript of 1206 records his election as Bishop under King John. It shows the individual signatures of the clerics who supported the choice of Jocelin as their new bishop, and it takes us straight into his political world. Look at this signature – written by someone who was very old, or very ill, or perhaps both. Who was he, and what made his mark on this page matter?

**IMAGE: MAGNA CARTA WITH JOCELIN'S NAME HIGHLIGHTED IN TEXT.**<sup>31</sup> Just image here – not in the Cathedral archives. In 1215 he was present when John issued Magna Carta. In 1216 he played a role at the coronation of Henry III at Gloucester. (Buildings Conservation Plan, p.11)

And here's Jocelin's own name, on another document – Magna Carta. This shows that he was present in support of the Barons, when in 1215 they forced King John to limit his own power in their favour. But King John and his successor Henry III also granted Jocelin special favours – did he have a talent for being on the right side? And then there's this. It's a replica of a medieval crozier which was found near the Cathedral – might it be Jocelin's?

The dragon is interesting. It might just be the inspiration for a legend that grew up around Jocelin, that said he had slain a local 'worm' or dragon. Maybe he did. But in the 1200s a dragon wasn't just a dragon – it was often a symbol of the devil. Maybe the battle shown here represents the bishop's spiritual fight against evil. If this *is* Jocelin's crozier, it tells us something about how he saw himself, and about what he took on when he became Bishop of Wells eight hundred years ago.

### **Under the Croquet Lawn**

On summer afternoons this is the perfect place for a game of croquet – have you ever seen a smoother stretch of turf? But just a few feet beneath the hoops and the balls there's another story about the history of the Palace. Here's Stuart Milby, the archaeologist who recently excavated this area, to tell us more.

#### **NUMBER 4: Stableyard**

This part of the Palace has always been a service area of one kind or another. Today the buildings house offices, a classroom, plant room, a kitchen – in Victorian times the horses and carriages were kept here. But before that? Here's Stuart Milby, the archaeologist who's excavated this area, to tell us a bit more about what's under our feet.

#### **NUMBER 5: Great Hall Ruins**

The imposing ruins are all that remains of a magnificent Great Hall. This was where the medieval Bishops displayed their power and their patronage with feasts that seem almost fantastic in their scale and their luxury.

Bishop Burnell built this Hall in the late 1200s as a space literally fit for a king. As both friend and Chancellor to King Edward the First, he could expect to host the monarch.

You can still see in the masonry the outlines of the elaborate two-storey porch that was designed to offer a fitting reception for the King. In the end Edward the First never actually came to Wells. But in 1331 his grandson, Edward the Third, did dine here with Bishop Ralph of Shrewsbury.

#### **IMAGE: BUCK ILLUSTRATION 1733 (PORCH HIGHLIGHTED)**

You can see here that the roof has already disappeared – the lead covering was stripped during the Reformation in the 1540s. Sadly, the porch too disappeared sometime in the 1700s, not long after this view of the Palace was recorded<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> CMP, p.32

#### **Burnell's Great Hall**

Even in its ruined state, this is one of the most impressive medieval buildings in England. It was a space designed to impress, a place for conspicuous consumption, fourteenth-century style.

This eastern end was where the Bishop and his important guests sat for feasts and entertainments, on a raised dais.

The floor was decorated with elegant encaustic tiles – these fragments were found during excavations here. And you have to imagine columns running down the hall on either side to form aisles.

At this point (by the statue), where you can see the doorways in north and south walls either side of this modern statue, there would have been a passage going across the building. This separated the entrances and service areas from the rest of the space.

And here at the far west end of the Hall, were some of those service rooms – most likely a buttery, where drink was decanted before serving, and a pantry, where bread, cold cooked food, table linen and drinking vessels were stored.

GOING OVER TO DOORWAY TO STABLEYARD Through there was a service courtyard, and possibly a kitchen, detached from the main building to reduce the risk of fire.

BACK TO WEST END, INDICATING Above our heads here was the solar – the more private room of the Lord Bishop. You can still see its large windows and fireplace.

ON SOUTH LAWN BY SE TOWER, INDICATING And it had a fine vaulted garderobe in the corner turret, which you can just see from here on the South Lawn. In fact, it's possibly the finest surviving medieval loo in the South West!

### **Trial and Execution**

A gruesome tale connects Glastonbury Tor to the ruined Great Hall here at the Palace.

In September 1539, Henry VIII's commissioners arrived at Glastonbury Abbey to strip its wealth and dispossess its community. The King was bent on dismantling the wealth and power of the medieval, Catholic church in England – and the great monasteries would soon fall.

The Abbot, Richard Whiting, resisted, and after interrogation was brought here. In this Great Hall, some kind of show trial took place on the orders of Thomas Cromwell.

A fictional Victorian account of the trial puts these words into Whiting's mouth:

*'I neither look for mercy, nor desire it. My cause I commit to God – I am weary of this wicked world and long for peace'*

Whiting was convicted of treason and the next day, 15 November, hanged, drawn and quartered.

His place of execution was adjacent to his own abbey – Glastonbury Tor.

### **Bishop Law's Palace**

George Law (Bishop 1824–1845)

George Henry Law became Bishop of Bath and Wells in 1821. His theology was somewhat conservative, but his taste in garden design was for innovation.

When Bishop Law came to Wells, the fashion was for landscapes full of craggy mystery and romantic ruins. There were already some impressive ruins here at the Palace:

But it seems for Bishop Law, they were not quite ruined enough. He directed that the South and East walls should be taken down. His objective was to create a more open view from the south and east, to frame a fashionable romantic landscape. We can probably assume that the bishop was pleased with the effect. Apparently many of his visitors were too – at least, they made a point of praising his good taste. But who knows what he may have destroyed in the cause of his garden improvements?

## **NUMBER 6: South Lawn**

PRESENTER WALKING ALONG SITE OF CANAL (SHOT FROM RAMPART) If I was walking along this line before the early 1800s, I'd be getting rather wet.

Throughout the 1700s there was an L-shaped ornamental canal here, reflecting the south wall of Bishop Burnell's great hall.

It was part of a formal Dutch-style water garden, which had been fashionable from the later 1600s. An ornamental canal was built for Charles II at Hampton Court Palace, for example.

The canal here at Wells flowed out to the moat, through an archway in the south rampart wall

PRESENTER BY BANKING WHERE CANAL FLOWED OUT

That archway was about here, to the left of the tree on the top of the banking.

In fact, the lawn here has changed repeatedly over time. Now the water flows only outside the Palace walls. But a dowser's survey of this area suggests that there were once other streams and small reservoirs throughout this space, perhaps as ornaments, or perhaps to irrigating areas of cultivation.

## **The Lost Grotto (SE Bastion Area)**

In the 1820s, Bishop Law was creating a 'Romantic' Gothic garden here. And you couldn't get more Romantic or Gothic than a grotto. So he had one built – just here.

The grotto was carefully designed to appear like a work of Nature. And it offered to the curious visitor, a glimpse of Nature's wonders.

Inside, was a display of what were then, popularly called 'monsters'. In fact we would recognise them as fossils, and we can just see some trilobites in this 1890s photograph of the grotto.

In Bishop Law's day Darwin's arguments for evolution were still two or three decades in the future. For the Bishop these mysterious objects were evidence of long-extinct animals which had drowned in the Great Flood of the Old Testament.

The fossils displayed here had been discovered on his estate at Banwell, where he set up a similar grotto and other 'bone caves' displaying prehistoric finds.

## **NUMBER 7: Bishop Ken's Walk**

This open, airy walkway along the rampart is linked in palace tradition with the name of Thomas Ken, who became bishop in 1685.

It's said that he came to walk here when he was composing his hymns. It's certainly an attractive image – this lanky, thoughtful figure pacing along the rampart, perhaps trying to think of a rhyme.

### **'Praise God, from whom all blessings flow'**

Ken wrote several well-known hymns, all ending with this 'doxology' – a short hymn of praise. It's now the most common form of doxology used in Anglican services all over the world.

*Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;  
praise him, all creatures here below;  
praise him above, ye heavenly host:  
praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.*

## **Panoramic View**

### **Tor Hill**

From this hill in August 1642, parliamentary supporters fired cannon on the Palace, where a royalist garrison was stationed. It was a small foretaste of the English Civil War, which broke out two weeks later.

### **Bishop's Park**

In 1207, Bishop Jocelin obtained a license from King John to create a deer park here, raising a wall around its perimeter.<sup>5</sup> CMP, p.16

### **Bishop's Mill**

The Bishop owned five flour mills in the surrounding area, all powered by water from his wells within the Palace grounds.

### **Bishop's Tithe Barn**

The Bishop owned large areas of land which was farmed by tenants. Their rent was a ten percent share or 'tithe' of their produce, stored in the Tithe Barn.

### **Bishop's Warren**

In the medieval period, rabbits (called 'coney') were valuable, both as food and for their fur. Warrens were managed by specialist gamekeepers.

### **Glastonbury Tor**

Glastonbury was an important Christian site in early medieval England, with the country's third wealthiest monastery. Bishop Jocelin tried to call himself Bishop of Bath and Glastonbury in the early 1200s, but the Abbot of Glastonbury resisted.

### **Bishop Ken's Palace**

Thomas Ken (Bishop 1685–1690)

Thomas Ken became Bishop in 1685, and resigned only four years later. But although his time here was brief, he has been remembered as one of the most admirable and principled men who has ever held this bishopric.

PRESENTER STANDING NEXT TO KEN'S TABLE IN PALACE ENTRANCE HALL Here at Wells, Ken was directly involved with his community. He looked after political prisoners, and provided meals for paupers at his own table – and here it is still, a relic of his charity.



Ken could command an audience: he was a very popular preacher. He wanted to communicate with people, and to provide them with ways of expressing their faith: the hymns which he wrote are powerfully simple. But Ken got into trouble when he engaged with the politics of his times.

Charles II had a certain sympathy for Ken, even though Ken had refused instructions to accommodate the King's mistress, Nell Gwynne, as his guest. It was Charles who appointed Ken as Bishop of Wells.

But Charles' successor James II was a Catholic, who tried to relax laws which restricted people's freedom of worship. Ken refused to cooperate, and James imprisoned him with six other bishops in the Tower of London.

James II was deposed in favour of the Protestant William of Orange, but this created another problem for Ken, He had sworn allegiance to James, and felt he must refuse – while James was still living – to do the same for William. There was no compromise on either side – and Ken's conscience at last cost him his bishopric.

Did Ken make the right choice? He might have achieved much as bishop here. But perhaps he felt that he had fulfilled his vocation in other ways.

#### **NUMBER 8: East Lawn**

These gardens have a long – but tantalisingly obscure – history. All we can be sure of is that they have been shaped and altered over the centuries by individual tastes and changing fashions. We know that in the 1620s Bishop Curll's wife had an enclosed garden somewhere here – and perhaps there were other bishop's wives and daughters who created their own gardens.

#### **NUMBER 9: Well House**

PRESENTER OUTSIDE WELL HOUSE, INDICATING CISTERN

The bishops and builders who created the Palace as we know it now have all had to deal with one, perennial question – what to do with all the water? Water was essential resource – but like any resource, had to be managed. This well house, built around 1451, was part of Bishop Thomas Beckynton's strategy for managing the water which flowed from the Palace wells. I'm going to show you how his system worked.

PRESENTER IN WELL POOL, WATER LEVEL LOWERED TO EXPOSE WEIR.

Beckynton created a reservoir of water by building a weir across the largest of the pools where water bubbled up from an underground stream. In the fourteen hundreds this was slightly *above* the surrounding ground level – so the water would naturally flow downwards, from here.

PRESENTER IN WELLHOUSE Water flowing from the pool collected in a cistern here. The cistern was used to control the flow of water into a conduit, or channel which led

westwards, beyond the Palace walls, to the town's market place – and here (MARKET PLACE, BY FOUNTAIN) water issued from a new well-head – much taller and more impressive than this Victorian replacement. Overflow from the wellhead washed away the blood and offal from the butchers' stalls which once traded near here and on either side of the high street there are still channels to carry this overflow away. Where Bishop Ralph's moat had used water to divide the Palace and the town, Bishop Beckynton used it to connect them.

### **Bishop Beckynton's Palace**

Thomas Beckynton (Bishop 1443–1465)

#### **PANELED ROOM.**

Jocelin, Burnell, Ralph of Shrewsbury – the great medieval bishops who held title to this Palace have slipped into the past leaving us little sense of who they were. But here's an exception. Here's a powerful man who wanted us to feel his presence, and made sure that we would.

Let's start with Bishop Beckynton's episcopal ring, with its amethyst representing .... Look how big it is – Beckynton would have won this over a glove, and offered his hand for petitioners to kiss. It's both a personal and a public symbol of Beckynton's spiritual authority – and it was buried with him.

#### **WALKING THROUGH PENNILESS PORCH**

And here is another symbol that's both personal and public. It's Beckynton's rebus – his name in a picture, a beacon made out of blazing barrel, or tun. It's here, like a brand, on 'Bishop's Eye', one of the new gateways that Beckynton built in Wells. Penniless Porch, next door, is also Beckynton's work, and people who were destitute could come here to receive a dole of charity

**WALKING INTO MARKET PLACE** And Beckynton built himself into the city. Here in the Market Place were new commercial buildings and a wellhead flowing with water from the springs in the Palace grounds.

**ENGRAVING OF BECKYNTON'S WELLHEAD** The perspective in this engraving isn't quite believable – but you can see that the wellhead must once have dominated the market place.

**STANDING BY WELL POOLS, CATHEDRAL IN BACKGROUND** And when Beckynton created the water supply, running to the market from his well pools, he made *this* into a symbol too. His grant makes the supply of water a gift in perpetuity. But, it also asks the people of Wells to remember Beckynton with a mass every year. It's a debt they still pay every January, with a service in his memory held in the Cathedral. And the water keeps flowing...

## **NUMBER 10: Well Pools**

**PRESENTER BY WELL POOLS** I'm standing at the most ancient and enduring part of the site. The whole Palace story over centuries, in fact, has been shaped from this location, by this source of water.

These pools are the wells that give Wells its name. The water that constantly fills them comes up from an underground river forcing its way through soft ground. And if you look carefully at the bottoms of the pools, you can see the wellsprings bubbling.

This water was a valuable practical resource which may help explain why the wells were enclosed within the Bishop's Palace grounds around 1200. Certainly, the strong flow was put to work powering grain mills in the town, most of which were owned by the Bishop.

But this water was also an important spiritual resource. The small well closest to the Cathedral is St Andrew's Well, believed to be the 'Great Spring' mentioned in Saxon-era records. And its water has probably been part of religious ceremony since at least 705, when King Ine gave land for building the earliest Christian church on this site. And before that? Who knows. Were earlier settlers – Roman and prehistoric – also drawn here by the compelling presence of water?

### **Bottomless Well**

**PRESENTER WALKING ROUND SIDE OF POND** This large curving pond was created around 1830<sup>6</sup> (<sup>7</sup>CMP says about 1830) by Bishop Law, who remodelled much of the Palace grounds to create a fashionable 'Romantic' landscape.

There were various smaller pools here, but the Bishop had ambitions to improve on Nature's more haphazard arrangement.

### **PRESENTER AT EAST SIDE OF POND, WITH CATHEDRAL IN BACKGROUND**

At this end of the pond, closest to the allotments, is the so-called 'Bottomless Well', the deepest here. Stand here to see the most Romantic view of the Cathedral, reflected in the deep, mirror-like pool. It's probably what Bishop Law hoped you would do!

### **Underground River**

**PRESENTER BY WELLS** In the area around the wells lies a buried secret. Deep beneath your feet, an underground river flows day and night.

The water in the wells comes from the Mendip Hills, to the north-east of Wells. Holes called 'stream sinks', also known as 'swallets', drain water from the slopes.

**PRESENTER BY WELL POOL** This water forms an underground river that by sheer pressure forces its way up through weak spots in the ground to form the pools or 'pots' you see here.

### **NUMBER 11: St Andrew's Well**

This well, nearest to the Cathedral boundary, has ancient associations. There is speculation that the spring was venerated by the ancient Celts, although this is not supported by any concrete evidence of worship. Burial finds in the area suggest the site may have been important to the Romans.

stream flowing from the well ran past the Saxon minster, established here in 705, four hundred years before the present Cathedral.

This earlier minster, like the present one, was dedicated to St Andrew, and so the 'Great Spring' here came to be associated with the saint.

Whether for practical or spiritual reasons, or both, the spring water was certainly integrated into the design of the medieval Cathedral grounds. You can see a culvert that drains out of the side of the well..

PRESENTER AT DIPPING PLACE BY CATHEDRAL. The water flows into a channel under the boundary wall and through the Cathedral grounds, forming this special 'dipping place'. From the middle ages water was dipped here, probably for use in the baptismal font and for other church ceremony.

### **NUMBER 13: Allotments**

What connects the Bishop of Bath and Wells to the humble potato? These allotments are part of the answer.

The allotments were established in 1946, on the site of the Palace's former kitchen garden, and are still leased by members of the public today.

But a longer tradition links the Bishops with vegetable growing. In the mid-1800s, in true Victorian spirit, Bishop Law established allotments for local residents outside the town. He intended them to be primarily for the cultivation of the potato, seen as an important source of nutrition for the poor.

### **NUMBER 14: Chapel**

Many people assume that the Cathedral is somehow the Bishop's personal church. Actually, this is. It's the Bishop's private chapel, and it has been for the best part of 800 years.

It was Bishop Burnell who built this chapel, in the late 1290s, to replace Bishop Jocelin's smaller chapel on the same site.

Burnell was a man of his time, and his chapel followed the newest fashion, its high, Gothic windows adorned with flowing tracery.

Here, the Bishop and his household – his family, his guests, his chaplains and his other staff - came for daily worship. The chapel is still a place of prayer and reflection, and now it is also open to everyone who visits the Palace.

HOLDING MARRIAGE REGISTER And look at this – it's a register which records marriage ceremonies celebrated in the chapel since the late 1800s. Only a few of the pages have

been filled – you need special permission from the Archbishop of Canterbury to be married here. But all the entries record the union of members of the Bishop's own household – from gardeners and servants to chaplains, and even, in recent years, the Bishop's own sons. It's a unique and intimate record of the community which lives in the Palace and supports the Bishop in his work. Several members of the Bishops household have been married here.

### **Bishop Burnell's Palace**

Robert Burnell (Bishop 1275–1292)

Bishop Burnell was a big wheel in the late twelve hundreds. And he built big too. His chapel doubled the height of its predecessor, built by Bishop Jocelin, and his Great Hall doubled the size of Jocelin's palace.

### **CHAPEL INTERIOR**

Two vast, opulent spaces - the hall for courtly entertainment, and this chapel for worship. What kind of a man builds on this scale? Bishop Burnell stands out of the past as an energetic, colourful figure. He's been described as a man of 'large and generous spirit' – and it's said that he 'enjoyed the chase of the wolf upon Mendip.

We know he was an extremely able politician. Edward the first placed great trust in Burnell, who even acted for a short period as the king's regent. Later he was the King's chancellor, and was intimately involved in affairs of state from law-making to military campaigns.

It's said that Burnell built the great hall in hopes of entertaining Edward I here. Certainly the King treated Burnell as a favourite, and nominated him for the post of Archbishop of Canterbury - the top job in the church in England.

But the Pope consistently vetoed Burnell's promotion. Burnell had many talents, but as far as Pope was concerned he had disqualified himself - by keeping a mistress.

### **NUMBER 15: The Jocelin Block**

This is the oldest of the buildings on site – but even before Bishop Jocelin built here in the early 1200s there were other, earlier structures. These too may have been Bishop's Palaces, residences for the Anglo-Norman and before them the Anglo-Saxon bishops of Wells.

It's astonishing to think that site has been used in much the same way for more than 800 years seventy eight bishops have held this Palace as their residence – a formal centre for their official business.

Of course, there have been some changes as successive bishops have adapted the Palace to suit them. Jocelin built the medieval core of this building, and inside the ground floor still looks much as he left it. The entrance porch, though is Victorian – and so is the second storey. Look up, and you can clearly see the change in stonework where a third floor was added by Bishop Bagot in the 1800s – his four daughters needed more bedrooms.

## High Ground

PRESENTER POINTING OUT GREAT HALL WINDOWS Look at these windows in the ruins of the Great Hall – the lower sills are almost at ground level and the entrance to the chapel is below the level of the croquet lawn.

PRESENTER POINTING OUT LOWER PALACE WALL And where the Palace meets the ground, it looks also as if it's been squashed in.

These are all clues that ground level here was between one and two metres lower when the Hall, the chapel and the rest of the palace were built. But even so, the Palace was actually built on comparatively high ground, rising out of what was essentially a marsh.

WALKING ACROSS THE CRQUET LAWN And there was a stream running through the marshy landscape between Jocelin's Palace and the Cathedral to the north-west. As you can imagine, after heavy rain, the wells overflowed and the area flooded.

Managing water on this site must have been a constant concern, for those who lived here. And in the 1340s Bishop Ralph came up with the solution, and caused this moat to be dug. A symbolic defence against attack, yes - but also a serious piece of engineering. Ralph's moat channelled the water and even in times of flood it could help control this unpredictable force of nature.

## NUMBER 16: Entrance Hall

When Bishop Jocelin built this palace in the 1200s, most people lived in basic, wooden structures. Building in stone demanded huge resources – think of the labour and money that went into creating the great cathedrals of medieval England. In fact, Jocelin employed masons who were already working on the cathedral to build this Palace. Wells must have been one big building site in his day.

In Jocelin's day this was an impressive, public space for arrivals and departures. In royal or noble houses like this one the principal rooms were usually on the first floor – and that's where the bishop would be – we'd have to climb the spiral staircase to find him.

Having to climb up to see the Bishop in the even more impressive rooms above was symbolic of his high status.

## Bishop Ken's Table

Bishops are only temporary residents here: when each one moves on he takes his own furniture with him – and the new bishop has to refurnish the place. But this table is an exception, and it has a story. The top is modern, but look at the base – it dates from the seventeenth century.

This is said to be the table where Bishop Ken gave a dinner, each Sunday, for twelve almsmen.

ALMS HOUSES ON PRIEST ROW Almsmen relied on organised charity for food and shelter. The almshouses where these men lived can still be seen in Wells today, in Priests Row.

### **Stained Glass**

The glass you see at the top of the windows is medieval – but it's not original to this building. In fact, it isn't even English – it comes from churches in Northern France.

When Henry Law became Bishop in 1820 he set about restoring damaged windows here and in the Cathedral. He bought glass from churches which had been damaged during the French revolution, and imported this to supply his repair project.

You can still see intriguing fragments of larger designs in many of the windows, here and in the chapel.

### **Staircase**

This beautiful staircase is Jacobean, built in the early 1600s. The fearsome green dragons or 'worms' guarding it are symbols of Somerset.

They're holding shields bearing the Bishop's arms, which you can also see carved into the Tudor fireplace. The keys of St Peter crossed with the sword of St Paul represent Bath. And the cross of St Andrew represents Wells.

### **NUMBER 17: Undercroft**

This is the Undercroft - a 'below stairs' area for storing anything that needed to be kept secure. It's a distinctive space, with handsome arch vaulting which supports the weight of the floor above. It looks and feels a bit like a cellar or a crypt – but it's not underground.

In fact, there are no basement or cellar spaces anywhere in the Palace. That's because the water table is so high here, that any excavated cellar would quickly fill up with groundwater.

It's another example of the impact that the surrounding water has had on the development of this site..

### **NUMBER 18: Long Gallery**

We're in the Long Gallery. Have a good look at the decoration around you? Does it look medieval?

Well, you're right it looks medieval, but it isn't medieval! Rather ironically, on the first floor of this medieval building we actually find ourselves immersed in a Victorian reinterpretation of medieval Gothic style. And that's not the only change to be seen here.

In the Middle Ages, this Long Gallery used to be even longer. This wall wasn't here. And neither was the Jacobean staircase you came up. So what was this strangely elongated room originally for?

When the Bishop was in residence this would have been a busy space. Here, the Bishop's staff, trainee clergy, petitioners and various hangers-on met, conducted business and waited for admittance to meetings with their patron, the Lord Bishop.

The Bishop's private home was also a public forum, where the Bishop held court. At a time when the Church dispensed its own system of justice, and when bishops could be powerful politicians, decisions made here could be matters of life and death.

### **Coronation Cope**

Bishops of Bath have had the special privilege of attending the sovereign at every coronation since that of Richard I, the 'Lionheart', in 1189. The Bishop of Bath and Wells has worn this cope at every cope was made for Bishop Kennion to wear at the coronation of Edward VII in 1902.

It has been worn by the Bishop of Bath and Wells at every coronation since. And you can see, here at the hem, where it was cut down to better fit the diminutive Bishop Bradfield for the Queen's coronation in 1953.

### **Wartime School**

During the Second World War, Bristol was a key target for Luftwaffe bombing and many children were evacuated. One Bristol school moved wholesale to the Bishop's Palace. The girls of St Brandon's Clergy Daughter's School took over the Long Gallery here, using it as both a dormitory and classroom.

### **Bishop Bagot's Palace**

Richard Bagot (Bishop 1845 – 1854)

Bishop Bagot was a man of the Victorian era. When he looked at the medieval Bishop's Palace he saw room for improvement and modernisation. It was the 1840s after all.

He remodelled the whole of this first floor, so that it now owes more to Victorian 'gothic' taste than to the real Gothic style of the Middle Ages.

The sort of style you find in the Houses of Parliament. Augustus Pugin designed both the exterior and interiors of this, and Bishop Bagot's architect, Benjamin Ferrey, was an ardent admirer.

But sadly, he didn't have the same budget to work with. After revealing these lovely medieval window heads, which had been covered in brick and plaster, he framed them with these elegant marble columns. [KNOCKS ONE] Which are actually made from much cheaper **enamelled cast iron. (comment MB1; I have tapped them and they sound of stone to me. Are we sure of this detail?)**

And what about this lavish use of intricately carved wood around the door frames and along the panelling? No – papier-mâché, painted to look like wood.

But this was a saving too far for Ferrey. Disgusted, he refused to have anything to do with such a sham. Still, it's a very convincing sham, don't you think, and 150 years later it still looks good.



## **Bagot's Builders**

Bishop Bagot not only had artistic differences with the architect of his remodelling scheme for the Palace, he also had trouble with his builders:

### **NUMBER 19: Drawing Room + Conference Room (Former Great Hall)**

As you enter the Drawing Room you're actually entering<sup>7</sup> the Great Hall of Bishop Jocelin's palace, built in the 1200s. Although it doesn't seem like it now. Later remodelling has split the Hall into two – this, and the Conference Room beyond.

And Bishop Bagot's Victorian plaster ceiling has filled in what used to be a towering roof space, open to the rafters.

The Great Hall was a grand space for dining, entertaining, ceremony, transacting important business and presiding over legal proceedings.

PRESENTER NEAR PLACE WHERE PAINT FOUND (BY EAST WINDOW IN ORIEL TOWER ROOM ON GROUND FLOOR OF BECKINGTON BLOCK)

Here, in another part of the palace, there's a clue to the sumptuous nature of the medieval decoration with which the Hall may once have been adorned.

I'm actually in the Oriel Tower, part of the private side of the palace. [INDICATING ABOVE AND TO SIDE OF EAST WINDOW] Just up there, hidden in the space between this later ceiling and the original medieval floor above it, a beautiful wall painting of the 1400s was discovered.

PHOTOS OF WALL PAINTING FOUND

A fashionably dressed woman is kneeling in devotion to a figure on a plinth. It provides a tantalising glimpse of the richness of the lost medieval interiors.

## **Abbot's Chair**

This chair, made around 1600, appears to once have had a swivelling writing table, attached here in the arm support. [Explain association with Abbot Whiting of Glastonbury – TBC, as it post-dates his death by 60 years]

## **Glastonbury Chair**

This is one of only two original examples of this style of chair, which has been much-copied. It belonged to John Thorne, Treasurer of Glastonbury Abbey, and so is known as a Glastonbury chair. Thorne was martyred alongside the Abbot, Whiting, for resisting the dissolution of the Abbey in 1539. The Latin inscription reads '*God save him, may the Lord give him peace and so praise God*'.

## **Blind Windows**

PRESENTER INDICATING (FROM INSIDE) These large medieval window openings are bit of a mystery. They were discovered behind bookcases in 1977. But there's no trace of any windows from the outside.

### **NUMBER 20: Panelled Room**

We'd have been extremely honoured to be standing in this room in the 1200s. It was the Bishop's solar, a comparatively private living-cum-bedroom separated from the main Hall, back through there. Here he received his most favoured guests.

It's now known as the Panelled Room due to the late-1700s wood-and-plaster panelling.

REACHING DOORWAY INTO ARCHIVE ROOM The doorway to the right of the window leads into another room, now used for storage. We'd have to have been the Bishop's very closest confidantes to go in there. It was the Bishop's guarderobe – a secure space to keep his clothes, valuable possessions, important documents, and luxury of luxuries, his personal toilet.

### **NUMBER 21: Bishop's Home & Offices**

PRESENTER IN MAIN OFFICE Computers, printers, filing. The medieval palace is also a busy nerve centre of a modern diocese. It's the Bishop's office, [POINTING UP] and he lives up there, 'above the shop' as it were.

The Bishop's home and office are not open to the public. The Bishop's accommodation is on the upper floor. The Palace's chaplain lives above the Bishop, in the attic rooms.

## **Bishop Peter's Palace**

### **The Bishop's 'Baby' Speech**

Bishop Peter reads an extract from his own maiden speech as Bishop of Bath and Wells in the House of Lords:

In the aftermath of the "Blackadder" television series, there are always perils for the bishops of Bath and Wells. I am constantly reminded of the alleged activities of one of my predecessors as a baby eater, as well as doing unmentionable things with a red hot poker. Entering your Lordships' House has proved no exception, and the greeting from the Doorkeeper on my first day referring to these matters was capped only by the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Southwark seeing my five-week-old granddaughter arrive and remarking, "*The Bishop has brought his own lunch.*"<sup>8</sup> (<sup>10</sup>Hansard)

### **Bishop's PA**

Caroline Turner

[Re: running the bishop's office. Explain variety of duties, areas of work, etc. To cover some/all of the following: The Bishops' Office is in fact shared by two bishops – as the

Bishop of Taunton assists the Bishop of Bath and Wells in running the Diocese. The Office support team manage their diaries and correspondence, and assist with their pastoral, liturgical, and public ministries in support of the mission of the Church.]

**NUMBER 22: Swan Platform**

***Accessed via map only and graphically differentiated from other stops***

[Outline significance of swans historically. When tradition of bell ringing began (1850s, by daughter of then Bishop, Robert Eden ,Lord Auckland). How swans trained. How many times fed a day, etc.]

**NUMBER 23: Bishop's Eye**

This imposing medieval gatehouse to the Palace is known as the Bishop's Eye. Through this, the Bishop kept a symbolic watch over the town of Wells.

For Bishop Beckynton, who built the gatehouse around 1450, it was definitely a benevolent eye.

He also constructed the 'Penniless Porch', where beggars could seek alms at the entrance to the Cathedral grounds.

PRESENTER APPROACHING FOUNTAINMost significantly, Beckynton built a water supply for the town, granted 'in perpetuity', and fed from the wellsprings in the Palace grounds.

The present Victorian fountain replaced the Bishop's highly ornamented well-head. But the water still flows today.

And that's fitting, because throughout its history, the story of the Bishop's Palace has been shaped by this water.