

VSV / DRAWBRIDGE WELCOMER FAQ

ENTRANCE

What is this place?

This is the entrance to the Bishop's Palace and Gardens. It is the home and office of the Bishop of Bath and Wells. Any valid ticket gets you entrance to the stunning 14-acres of grounds and gardens; Well Pools, where Wells gets its name; 800-year-old palace, chapel and the ruins of the medieval banqueting hall. There is so much more to discover behind these walls, including a varied series of events

What time are you open to visitors?

We're open seven days a week, except Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day. Although, we can have unplanned closures due to bad weather and filming

Summer opening hours: 9.30am - 5.30pm

Winter opening hours: 10am - 4pm

Where are the toilets?

Toilets, including accessibility and baby changing, can be found through the arch near the cafe (free area); To the right of the wooden staircase in the palace; in the arboretum near the children's play area

Where can I buy a ticket?

The ticket office and shop are next to the cafe. Alternatively, tickets can be purchased from our website and collected from the ticket office

Do I have to pay to get in?

Yes! However, there is a free area including stable yard with a tantalising glimpse of the lawns and medieval ruins, an award-winning cafe and toilets. Visitors here for the day can take advantage of a special joint ticket which includes both Bishop's Palace and the Cathedral. Both sites must be visited on the day of purchase; at £20 per adult, it's great value: saving £11.50 each! Note: children are free in the cathedral, but still require a ticket at £8.75 to visit the Bishop's Palace (under 5s are free). Ask at the ticket office about carers tickets. There's also a 20% discount on a day ticket when bought from our website

How much do tickets cost?

Our tickets cost £17.50 per adult / £8.75 per child (under 5s are free) and allow free re-entry for 12-months (excluding rare plant fairs and artisan market); membership starts at £45 for an individual (£33.75 with Direct Debit and purchased on website). Joint day tickets between Bishop's Palace and Cathedral are £20 per adult

What special events to you have here?

We have a varied programme of events throughout the summer and school holidays. They include re-enactment groups covering periods from the Vikings to the English Civil War (entry included with any standard admission). During school holidays and half-term, we have children's activities, trails and storytelling (entry included with any standard admission).

During the summer evenings we host outdoor theatre, opera and concerts; there is a charge for these events

What kind of food does the cafe serve?

Serving delicious, locally sourced homemade food and some of the best coffee and cake you'll find in Wells; also, a selection of sandwiches, pasties and sausage rolls.

You can also book for Sunday lunches

Do you have guided tours?

- During the summer months (April – October) palace & chapel @ 11am & 2pm / grounds and gardens @ 12am & 3pm
- During the winter months there's just one combined palace and gardens tour @ 12'o'clock

These are subject to the availability of our volunteer guide team; best to check with ticket office on the day

Can I use my RHS / National Trust / English Heritage / Gardener's World 2-4-1 cards to get in?

- Not with National Trust and English Heritage
- Yes, on a Friday with RHS
- Every day (excluding the fairs) with Historic House Association and Gardener's World 2-4-1
- Please direct all these card holders to the ticket office

Can I bring my car on site?

There are usually two blue badge / accessibility parking spaces available every day (immediately left after passing through the gatehouse). These need to be booked in advance, either over the phone, or in person at ticket office

Can I leave my car here while I go into town?

No! We ask visitors not to leave their car on site while they go into Wells. This allows our limited number of spaces to be used by other visitors to the palace

Can I use my ticket to go into town and come back again?

Yes! But you will have to show it again at the gate

Can I take my children's scooters and bikes into the grounds?

We politely ask parents to leave all children's scooters and bikes behind the lodge; alternatively, they can lock them up at the bike racks by the Book Nook. We can't accept responsibility for them

Is smoking allowed on site?

No! Smoking or vaping is not permitted on site

BISHOPS

Where does the Palace come within the hierarchy and significance of all other palaces within the country?

The church is led by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, Canterbury the more senior of the two. From the 42 dioceses London, Durham, Winchester and Bath and Wells are among the most senior bishops

Why does the Bishop of Bath & Wells officiate at the Coronation?

Since Richard I (Lionheart) in 1189 the Bishop of Bath and Wells (on the left of the sovereign) and the Bishop of Durham (on the right) have assisted the monarch at the coronation. But at some coronations the Bishop has not officiated. For example, one bishop in the 1400s was in jail having fallen foul of the King!

Although recent research is hinting that this tradition may go further back than Richard I, and could have started with a Saxon king in 973.

Does the Bishop still live here?

Yes! The Bishop of Bath and Wells has his residence and office in what's known as the North Wing; access to this area is by appointment only. The original palace, where successive bishops lived between the early 1200s and late 1940s, is now open to visitors. We are unique in being the only bishop's palace in the country to have a bishop living on site and is open to visitors

GROUNDS & GARDENS

What's that big tree on the lawn?

It's an American black walnut tree and is around 200 years old; planted in about 1820 by Bishop Law as part of his landscaping. In the mid 1980s it was struck by lightning, cuttings were taken and planted near to the existing tree; affectionately known as Father & Son.

What's that big tree behind the picnic benches just past the Gatehouse?

This is a London plane tree and around 200 years old. So called because it is was/is widely used in the capital to capture pollution

How many gardeners work in the gardens?

We have five paid gardeners, and about 20 volunteer gardeners. There are another 20 volunteers who work in the community garden

Can I bring my dog / are dogs allowed?

Well behaved dogs on a short lead can go into the gardens, cafe and ticket office. However, dogs are not permitted into the palace and chapel; the exception to this is for guide / assistance dogs, they are allowed into the buildings

Is there a cafe inside the grounds?

During the summer there is a small cafe in the formal gardens in what we call the Apple Store, just behind the swing seat (opening times do vary)

Can I take food and drink into the grounds?

Yes, you can. The Bishop's Table as a range of takeaway food and drink. You are also most welcome to bring in your own picnic to enjoy on the lawn or using one of the benches and tables

PALACE & BUILDINGS & MOAT

When do the palace & other buildings date from?

- The land for the palace was acquired by Bishop Jocelin from King John in the early 1200s (1206)
- Construction of the main palace building began around 1220
- The banqueting great hall and chapel by Bishop Burnell in late 1200s (1280ish)
- Battlements, moat, gatehouse by Bishop Ralph of Shrewsbury in mid 1300s (1340ish)
- North wing (bishop's office and residence) by Bishop Bekynton in mid 1400s (1450ish)
- Grounds and gardens landscaped by Bishop Law in early 1800s (1820ish)
- Top floor of palace by Bishop Bagot in mid 1800s (1840ish)

What's that wall behind you?

That's one of two surviving walls of the old medieval great hall; originally used for entertaining and banqueting. The oak beams and lead from the roof were sold off in the mid 1500s to help raise money because the country was bankrupt; two walls taken down in the early 1800s, possibly to create a more romantic ruin

Why do the doorways look squat / small?

In the 1820s Bishop Law raised the ground level by an average of 18 inches across the site landscaping the gardens and improving the grounds to help prevent flooding. Note you have to go down to the original ground level to enter the chapel

How deep is the moat?

The good-sized moat has a surface area of two acres. At its deepest it is approximately two metres deep, and when full holds over 18 million litres (4 million gallons) of water; fed by water from the well pools

Why is the moat mucky / cloudy / green sludge?

At times the moat can contain algal blooms and pond weed; this is fed by agricultural run-off containing fertilizers and nutrients. Other times it's just disturbed mud and sediment from the bottom

What type of fish are in the moat?

Small fish! Probably minnows and sticklebacks which are an ideal size for our resident kingfishers; bigger fish get eaten by the otter, which visits from time to time!

Does the drawbridge ever go up?

The drawbridge was last raised in 1831 when news of riots in Bristol prompted Bishop Law to take this precaution. However, the drawbridge we have today is modern and fixed in place. The gatehouse itself was built in the mid 1300s by Bishop Ralph of Shrewsbury as part of the general fortifications

How old are the gatehouse doors?

Difficult to say for sure: they have been added to and re-enforced over the years.

What is the nativity scene inside the gatehouse for?

Good question! The stone base was once a basin for washing your hands before entering the palace. The stone case on top is quite modern, probably dating to Victorian times. And the nativity scene inside was donated by Bishop Peter Price's wife, Dee.

Can I have my wedding reception here?

Yes! The palace and/or gardens can be hired for wedding receptions and other private functions

SWANS, DUCKS & CAT

What are the names of the swans?

Our current resident swan pair have been here since 2019 and are called Grace and Gabriel. The cygnets are nearly impossible to tell apart; each year we ask for suggestions for their names, these are then pulled out of a hat

How long have swans been on the moat? General swan information?

Our current pair, Gabriel and Grace, have been living on our moat since 2019; they'll be with us for life. They have between one and seven cygnets every year; these cygnets usually leave before the next brood hatch. We teach each new pair to ring the bell for food, and they pass on this skill to their young. There have been swans at the palace since the middle of the 1800s, when one of Bishop Eden's daughters first taught the swans to ring the bell.

What time are the swans fed?

When the swans get hungry, they all gather round underneath the bell, that's when we usually lower the rope for them to ring and get fed. We don't feed them at a particular time, just as and when they gather near the bell, and someone is in the bevy room to open the window and let the cord hang down for them to pull

What happened to last year's swans and where are they now?

Last year's cygnets have now left our moat and most likely settled on the Somerset Levels

Are the swans descended from or owned by the current monarch (visitor asked if related to Windsor Castle)?

Our mute swans come from a wildlife sanctuary. While it's often said that all swans are 'owned' by the current monarch, in fact, King Charles III has the right to claim unmarked (unclaimed) mute swans (but not whooper or Bewick swans) that are on open water on public land. Curious yes, but a tradition that started many centuries ago when owning swans was the ultimate in luxury at a banquet or feast table (yes, we have mute swans)

Why can't I feed bread to the ducks or swans?

As advised by the RSPB we discourage the feeding of bread because it just fills them up, while offering very little in the way of nutritional value. They encourage people to use things like sweetcorn, porridge oats and defrosted frozen peas as well as bird seed

What is the name of the cat?

The cat you're most likely to see roaming the gardens is a Maine Coon called Lenski.

MISCELLANEOUS

What game is being played on the lawn?

Croquet. The Croquet Club play most afternoons between April and October

Are there bins / dog waste bins inside the grounds?

No. Please ask visitors to bring their rubbish out and use the bins in the free area near the cafe (and to separate recycling); dog waste bin can be found against the wall near the gatehouse

What are the names of the trees on the green before the moat?

- Horse chestnut is the tree outside the gatehouse next to moat
- The big tree on the left as you leave is a cedar of Lebanon
- The trees on the right are (Indian) bean tree and black locust tree
- There's also a foxglove tree on the left

Which way to the Cathedral?

Through the gatehouse (Bishop's Eye) into the marketplace, turn immediately right and through another gatehouse (Penniless Porch) and cathedral is right in front of you

Where is Vicars' Close?

It is the oldest continually inhabited street in Europe!

Walk past the cathedral on the right until you reach the road, turn right and walk under the bridge, Vicars' Close is immediately on the left

What films and TV series have been filmed at the Bishop's Palace?

The Bishop's Palace and Gardens has been the backdrop to many films, TV shows and photo shoots.

- Feature films: The Huntsman, Winter's War (2016) & Hot Fuzz (2007)
- TV Series: Poldark, The White Princess, Spanish Princess, Becoming Elizabeth
- Other shows: Antiques Roadshow, Gardeners' World, Escape to the Country, Wolf Hall

More information on the website:

<https://bishopsalace.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Visitors-Frequently-Asked-Questions-Updated-30-June-2022.pdf>

<https://bishopsalace.org.uk/about/faq/>

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