

## WINCHESTER TOUR 1973

Thirty-six members set out on Sunday 15 April for a five day tour centred on Winchester. After a long journey, with stops at Droitwich and Marlborough, we arrived at Winchester somewhat later than anticipated.

On Monday we visited Fishbourne, Chichester and Porchester. The Roman palace of *Fishbourne* is a newly opened site. It was obviously a sumptuous place of residence, containing about 60 mosaic floors, several of which are now on view in the museum. These are the oldest known mosaics in the country and, apart from the usual designs of gods and goddesses, show geometric designs which may denote Greek influence. Half the garden area of Roman times is now laid out with a neat hedge and its extent gives some idea of the size of the original palace and grounds.

At *Chichester Cathedral* extensive repairs created continual noise inside and out; we were unable to see the Lady chapel, and, being Holy Week, all tapestries had been put away. Several different architectural styles were noted: Norman, Transitional and Early English. The choir screen was a solid looking stone structure erected in memory of Bishop Bell. More modern still were the lectern and pulpit in stone faced concrete, decorated with a cast aluminium design which, strangely enough, fitted in well with the medieval building. We went on to *Porchester* in brilliant afternoon sunshine. This Roman fort and Norman castle occupied a strategic site by the water. The Norman castle, built over the Roman fort by Henry I, was used as a residence and point of departure for Normandy.

Tuesday was the highlight of the tour when we visited Salisbury, Stonehenge and Old Sarum, taking in Romsey abbey as an afterthought on the way. Mrs Bailey met us outside *Salisbury Cathedral*. Inside this graceful structure there is much Victorian restoration. In the library we were invited to admire one of the four extant copies of Magna Carta and Sir Christopher Wren's notes on the repairs necessary after the Commonwealth period. Standing under the massive tower and spire, not part of the original design, we saw the ominous bulging of the supporting marble pillars, and the arches added in the fourteenth century to prevent collapse. From the cloisters we could see iron bands round the spire, added for the same reason.

After an all too short visit to Salisbury we moved on to *Stonehenge*. When the stones first appeared they seemed dwarfed by the immensity of Salisbury Plain. Stonehenge is now a busv centre, flanked by a main road and visited by tourists who disturb the solitude and atmosphere of the place. Nevertheless, it is an impressive sight and lingers in the memory. Our last call was at *Old Sarum*, the iron age hill fort, Norman castle and bishop's palace. This huge site was quieter and pleasanter. Here William the Conqueror received homage from all the principal landowners in 1085. Now, only the shape of the cathedral can be traced out, yet the influence of Old Sarum was felt throughout England for the offices and forms of worship instituted here by Osmund became known as 'the use of Sarum' and were used until a satisfactory English Prayer Book was drawn up at the Reformation.

Wednesday was given over to Winchester. First we saw how a church could be successfully adapted to form a record office. Our second call was at the *Hospital of St. Cross*, the oldest charitable foundation in Britain set up by Henry de Blois, bishop of Winchester and added to by Cardinal Beaufort. Today 20 old men wear the black gown, cap and silver cross of

the original foundation and 6 more the mulberry gown and cap of Beaufort. A traditional 'dole' to travellers survives still and two of our company successfully applied for and received a portion of bread and ale.

The climax of the tour was our visit to *Winchester Cathedral*, solid, squat and immensely long. There were Batik paintings of the Apocalypse on show for a few days, giving a welcome colour. Although the cathedral is Norman the round pillars have been cased in with more slender pillars and the arches have been made pointed. Many interesting features engage the visitor: the chantry chapels, original floor tiles, the black tomb of William Rufus and the six reliquary chests above the choir screen which contain the bones of the earliest kings of England and their queens. Jane Austen's grave is here. Also striking are the military memorials, chapels, brasses, flags, books of remembrance and lists of the fallen in various wars. Truly this was the capital of Wessex and England.

MRS H. EDWARDS

Once again the society is indebted to Joan Beck for organising such a stimulating tour.