# Salisbury and Salisbury Cathedral



The City of Salisbury stands at the confluence of five rivers, the Hampshire Avon, the Nadder, the Bourne, the Wiley and the Ebble. Situated 20 miles from Southampton and Bath it lies on the edge of the Salisbury Plain which is a busy military training area.

The original settlement grew up about 1½ miles north of the present city where an Iron Age hilltop fort was built on a hilltop between 600 and 300 BC and became known as Old Sarum. It was the meeting place of several medieval trade routes. It was occupied by several local tribes, the Romans and the Vikings. After the Norman conquest of England a motte and bailey castle was built.

The Doomsday book was presented to William the Conqueror at Salisbury and the first cathedral was consecrated in 1092.

Old Sarum gradually fell into decay in the late 12th century and a new settlement, called New Sarum, began to be constructed on the plain by the confluence of the five rivers. Construction of the current cathedral began in 1220 and was completed 38 years later.

A charter was given to the city of New Sarum in 1227. Development of the city was steady to the point that by the 14th century, it was the largest city on Wiltshire. A charter market was granted in 1277 allowing the city to hold a market on Tuesday and Saturdays, which it still does today. In the 15th century there are records of four markets, a meat and cheese market, a woollen and game market, a cattle and livestock market and a poultry market.

In 1324, 1328, and 1384 the English Parliament met in Salisbury.

From the Middle Ages through to the start of the 20th century, Salisbury was famous for its high-quality steel cutlery due to the purity of the water used in its production.

During the Second World War Spitfire planes were produced in Salisbury after production sites in Southampton were destroyed by bombing.

In 1972 the old charters of New Sarum were abolished and a new city council of New Sarum was established. In 2009, the name of Salisbury was formally adopted.

Salisbury is the setting for Thomas Hardy’s Melchester in his novels.

Much of the medieval grid pattern of streets remains in the city centre and there are many examples of timber framed and stone buildings to be seen. The illustration below is Poultry Cross, the site of the Medieval poultry market with beautiful timbered buildings in the background.

Today, Salisbury is a thriving city with a population of around 42.000. It is an important market city and tourist centre.

## Salisbury Cathedral

On arrival at the Cathedral, you have the choice of making your own way around the building or being escorted by your tour guide. If you choose to do your own thing, please make sure you meet up at the rendezvous point at the correct time. **Do not be late!**.

The original cathedra was bult on the low ground at Old Sarum but abandoned in the late 13th century.

A site in the valley on the flood plain at the confluence of the five rivers was chosen for the new cathedral and work on the present cathedral started in 1220 and took 38 years to complete. Over the next 100 years more was added to the building which, over the succeeding centuries, has continued to evolve. The foundations for the building are only 4 feet deep (1.2 metres) and are based on wet gravel because the water table is so high. To stop the building sinking, many buttresses, bracing arches and anchor points have been added to spread the load. Not surprisingly, the tower and spire lean out from the vertical by 2.3 feet (0.7 metres) but today, it is stable. There is a hole in the cathedral floor where you can see how close to the surface the top of the water table is. This is measured twice a day, and f necessary, sluice gates are used to control the water level.

The tower and spire are the crowning glory of Salisbury Cathedral. At 404 feet (123m) it is the tallest tower and spire in Britain. It also boasts the largest cloisters in Britain. A windlass, based in a treadmill, used to lift building materials up the tower, can still be seen in the tower today.

The cathedral close is one of the largest in Britain enclosing 80 acres (just under 32.5 hectares).

During the 15th century, the cathedral became a place of pilgrimage with visitors flocking to see the remains of Osmund who was made a saint in 1457. It is still a site of pilgrimage today.

During the English Reformation, 1534 to 1590 a period of great religious upheaval, the cathedral changed its allegiance from Roman Catholicism to the Church of England.

The cathedral has the best preserved copy of the Magna Carta which is on display in the Chapter House. There are only four surviving copies of this historic document signed by King John in 1215. Magna Carta is a very significant document because it sets out the rights and freedoms of the English people in law, limiting the power of the monarch and introducing trial by jury. Its principle is that no-one is above the law: everyone has equal status. As such it is the foundation of democracy which is followed by many countries in the world. An attempt, unsuccessful, was made to steal the Magna Carta in 2018. A considerable amount of damage was done to the display, but the Magna Carta was not harmed.

The cathedral is home to what is reputed to be the world’s oldest working clock being recorded in the Guinness Book of Records, although this is a subject of considerable debate.. It was originally housed in the bell tower and was designed to strike the hour telling people when services were held. It did not have a face and was driven by a pendulum. The bell tower was demolished in 1792 and the clock was removed to the cathedral tower. In 1884, the tower was demolished, and the clock was put away to be forgotten about. It was rediscovered in 1929 in a very poor state and was partially restored before being displayed to the public. In 1956, the clock was fully restored and put on display where you can see it today in the north knave. It is powered by falling weights which need winding up each day. The expression “to wind somebody up” is derived from winding up the clock weights to provide energy for the clock.

Salisbury Cathedral is unusual in that it does not have a peal of bells, a distinctive feature of English ecclesiastical architecture. Norwich and Ely cathedrals are the only two other cathedrals that do not have a peal.

The cathedral has an extensive archive covering hundreds of years from medieval times with documents of ecclesiastical, legal, and historical importance which have and are still, proving invaluable to scholars. There is also a large well stocked library.

Records show that between 1864 and 1953, peregrine falcons nested successfully on the tower. In 2014, a family or peregrine falcons returned to nest on the tower and have returned every year since successfully raising a family of chicks. A webcam has been set up so you can see what is going on in the nest and video is streamed worldwide. The stream can be watched at [Live Peregrine Nestbox Webcam | Salisbury Cathedral, UK](https://www.salisburycathedral.org.uk/discover/peregrine-falcons/peregrine-live-webcam/).

During the Pandemic, Salisbury Cathedral was set up as a vaccination centre for the city and surrounding area and as a place of contemplation and retreat. The organist played soothing music during this period while the cathedral was open.