

## **OLD WARDOUR CASTLE**

### **Tisbury, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP3 6RR**

**14<sup>th</sup> September 2017**

I must confess it was more of an afterthought that led us to Old Wardour Castle, while looking for somewhere to go on a free holiday afternoon. I loved the name as soon as I heard it, though, just begging to be pronounced "Warrdourrr", as in J R R Tolkein's *Lord of the Rings* film with its Middle-earth version of "Morrdorrr". It's surprising what amuses a person.

It was therefore with little actual expectation that we drove to the English Heritage site along a road that turned out to be quite surprising. Heaven knows where we were, but we passed under a stone archway as if we'd taken a wrong turning onto a private estate and then found ourselves on a single-track road that seemed to go on for miles.

It obviously wasn't wrong, however, as we eventually arrived at the correct car park. Having achieved that, though, we definitely took a wrong turning upon leaving the car and almost ending up in somebody's back yard. The clothes drying on an airer and a sign saying there was no access to Old Wardour Castle gave it away. However, retracing our steps to the car park and heading in the other direction soon took us to the small ticket office and shop, where we paid £4.50 each and were given an audio tour guide each - yay!

The sun was making a determined effort to shine as we made our way to the remains of the late 14<sup>th</sup> century lightly fortified dwelling. In fact, it was shining right in my eyes as I tried to take a photo, which made it a bit tricky. I was so engrossed in trying to do my best, that Alan had disappeared inside with his audio-guide by the time I remembered I had one too.



**Warrdourrr!** (Photo by Alan Santillo)

The Saxon kings of Wessex had once occupied the site, but at the time of the Norman Conquest, it had been granted to Wilton Abbey, a Benedictine nunnery. By 1393, the Lovell family had full possession of the estate, having married into the St Martin family, who'd been abbey tenants for some time. John, 5<sup>th</sup> Lord Lovell (c.1340-1408), sought and obtained royal permission to build a castle, having acquired a licence for crenellation from King Richard II.

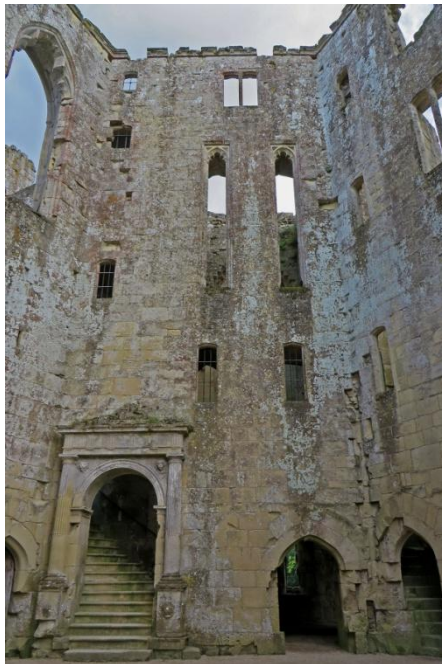
One small question is still bothering me about this family - and that is whether their surname is spelt as Lovel or Lovell. Since the latter looks prettier, I have plumped for that version, while admitting I could be wrong. Having said that, I know how spelling wasn't of prime importance in centuries gone by (which is frankly quite annoying).

As for the extensive building project, its design was inspired by the fashionable Continental hexagonal style, which was unique in Britain. It combined comfort and luxury with its inclusion of several self-contained guest suites, along with defensive might. It would have been enclosed by a dry ditch and fronted by a drawbridge, thus posing a significant threat to attackers. A series of portcullises, huge walls and corner turrets crowned with battlements would have added to the effect, along with a substantial curtain wall for further security.



**An imposing entrance**

The master mason was William Wynford and the building was constructed with locally quarried Tisbury greensand. It was definitely on the tall side, with the castle's four storeys surrounding a central hexagonal courtyard, from where several doorways led to the upper levels. The well was also located within the courtyard.



**Tall!**

It was decidedly chilly within the walls, but the audio tour held my interest as it talked me around an enormous kitchen block that filled the ground floor and a lot of the first floor with huge fireplaces, walk-in cupboards, bread ovens, sinks and drains leading to storage cisterns in the basement. The buttery and pantry were nearby, from where the guests would have been served in the great hall, which spanned the area immediately above the main entrance.

Wardour Castle remained in the Lovell family until 1461, when it all kicked off during the Wars of the Roses (1455-1485). The owner at the time was Francis, 9<sup>th</sup> Baron Lovell (1454-1487?), who took the side of the red rose Lancastrians. This resulted in the Lovell estates, including Wardour Castle, being confiscated by King Edward IV.

Francis switched sides to the white rose Yorkists and later became an ally of King Richard III. He was one of a trio of staunch supporters dubbed in Tudor propaganda as 'the cat, the rat and Lovell our dog', who ruled all England 'under a hog' (namely, Richard III).

However, the good times didn't last and when Richard III was defeated and killed at the Battle of Bosworth Field in 1485, Lovell was all but ruined. He remained committed to the Yorkist cause and was present at the Battle of Stoke Field in 1487, which saw the final defeat of the Yorkists. Francis then fled to Scotland, where he disappeared to an unknown fate.

The Tudor victor, King Henry VII decided to sell Wardour Castle, which was later purchased by Sir Thomas Arundell (c.1502-1552). The Arundells were an ancient and prominent Cornish family and their name sounded familiar. Having the renowned Vivian Cornish family in my ancestry, I'm almost certain an Arundell married a Vivian way back. It's a small world, especially when you research ancestry!

Sir Thomas had managed to become a privy counsellor to Cardinal Wolsey and also benefited from his marriage to Margaret Howard, who was the sister of King Henry VIII's fifth wife, Catherine Howard. Despite surviving Catherine's downfall and sticky end by execution, he failed to survive the turbulent reign of the young King Edward VI. Sir Thomas Arundell was known as a staunch Roman Catholic and those in power had concerns about his influence and his devotion to the old religion. He was charged with conspiring to overthrow the government and beheaded on Tower Hill for treason in 1552.

Wardour Castle was again confiscated, but was bought back in 1570 by Thomas's son, Sir Matthew Arundell (c.1535-1598) and managed to stay in the family for a while. Sir Matthew transformed the castle into an Elizabethan mansion, embellishing the main entrance and refurbishing the great hall. He added a new minstrel's gallery, reshaped the fireplace and replaced the old wall hangings and banners with wooden panels. Other alterations were made to the lobby leading off from the great hall and to the stairs to the upper rooms.

As the audio guide and I progressed through the various areas and ultimately up to the top floor, it was clear to see that very little remained of the upper rooms that would once have been the most inviting part of the castle. As in the great hall, the rooms were high, with intricate wooden roofs. Each room would have been graced with two tall windows looking out onto the landscape, while a third would have looked into the courtyard. By 1605, the upper rooms had been converted into a gallery, one long room with many windows, as was popular on the upper floors of Elizabethan houses. Even then, people liked to move with the times.



**Open to the elements**

Sir Matthew's son, Sir Thomas Arundell (c.1560-1639) seemed an interesting character, being imprisoned for fervent Catholicism in 1580, but demonstrating loyalty to Protestant Queen Elizabeth I. In 1588 he donated £100 towards the defeat of the Spanish Armada. In 1605, King James I created him 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Arundell of Wardour, although he was briefly suspected of complicity in the Gunpowder Plot. In 1637, he attempted to sell Wardour Castle to the king, but died there in 1639.



His son Thomas, 2<sup>nd</sup> Baron Arundell of Wardour (c.1586-1643) fought for King Charles I during the Civil War (1642-1651). In spring 1643, he left Wardour to join the Royalist army amassing at Oxford. That was when the real trouble started, as he left his wife Blanche to defend Wardour Castle with a garrison of 25 trained fighting men. Poor woman!

On 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1643, Sir Edward Hungerford (of Farleigh Hungerford Castle no less) arrived with up to 1,300 men of the Parliamentary army and demanded admittance to search for Royalists. Feisty Lady Arundell refused, whereupon Sir Edward laid siege with guns and mines, but five days later, poor Old Wardour was threatened with complete destruction and Lady Arundell surrendered.

The castle was placed under the command of Colonel Edmund Ludlow, but meanwhile, Thomas had been mortally wounded in the Battle of Stratton on 16<sup>th</sup> May 1643. Despite a Parliamentary garrison occupying his inheritance, Thomas's son, Henry 3<sup>rd</sup> Baron Arundell (c.1607-1694), laid siege to his own castle in March 1644. He managed to blow up a fair bit of it in the process, but succeeded in eventually causing the garrison to surrender.

The Arundells returned to Old Wardour in the 1680s and the family slowly recovered power, although they never reconstructed their devastated castle. Instead they built a small house in the popular mock-Gothic style just outside the castle wall, which was known as the banqueting house. Also around this time, they began to develop the grounds around Old Wardour.

Time passed, bringing more change. Henry, 8<sup>th</sup> Baron Arundell (c.1740-1808), borrowed money to build New Wardour Castle nearby, which was started in 1769 and completed in 1776. Old Wardour Castle was left as an ornamental feature within the surrounding parkland, its raison d'être a romantic ruin. New Wardour Castle wasn't actually a castle at all, but a Palladian-style symmetrical neo-classical country house, which may be descriptive overkill. The famous landscape architect, Lancelot 'Capability' Brown was hired to transform the grounds, which involved earth moving, tree planting and lake making.



**New Wardour out there somewhere** (photo by Alan Santillo)

Still from the lofty heights of Old Wardour Castle, we gazed through a window aperture towards New Wardour Castle, which was nestling a mere 2 kilometres/1.5 miles away in the surrounding countryside. Additional buildings had been added to it in the 1970s and 1980s, but the most interesting fact to me was that from 1961 to 1990, it had been the home of Cranborne Chase School, an independent boarding school for girls. Imagine! I bet they had on-site historical lessons at Old Wardour Castle some days and off-hours hysterical feasts in the dormitories some nights. Or maybe not...

It was still a sunny enough afternoon amid the clouds, so we strolled down to the banqueting house overlooking the lake and had a little wander around inside. It's thought to have been a place for refreshments for castle visitors in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, but nowadays serves as a venue for wedding ceremonies in the hall that's graced with beautiful stained glass windows. For us, it offered handy 'conveniences' and a small exhibition on the history of the gardens.

Once outside again, we walked back up towards the old castle and discovered there was a good view of the ruins against the backdrop of a beautiful blue September sky. It was easy to see how Old Wardour Castle was considered a romantic ruin in days gone by - and still nowadays if the civil marriage ceremonies on offer within the castle (as well as the banqueting house) are anything to go by.



**The romantic ruins of Warrdourr**

According to our slightly longwinded audio guide, we weren't finished yet and dutifully made our way around the outside of the castle towards an 18<sup>th</sup> century stone grotto. The sun was still out, but often hiding behind clouds, offering us different views and differing aspects of moodiness. I liked the fact that Old Wardour Castle had featured in Kevin Costner's 1991 film *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*, as I did once love a bit of Kevin Costner. Moving swiftly on, New Wardour Castle had played its part as the dance school in *Billy Elliot*.



**A not quite as romantic aspect of Warrdourr**

The grotto was located at the northern end of the property, built in 1792 by Josiah Lane of Tisbury, who was a well-known builder of grottos and garden features at the time. He was commissioned to build an artificial cave from brick, stone and plaster from the castle ruins, that was to be decorated with dripping water, ferns and fossils.

In my opinion, the only trouble was that he committed an act of archaeological sacrilege and pillage by incorporating three standing stones from a nearby prehistoric stone circle at Tisbury. Whether he was acting according to instructions, I know not, but the remains of the stone circle are hidden in woodland behind the English Heritage ticket office.



**Steps leading up to the grotto**

The sunlight was strong inside the grotto and not exactly conducive to photos. We were also tiring and therefore didn't linger, but left the grotto to the birds that now nest within its stonework. As we made our way back to hand in our audio guides, I reflected how astonished I was at the history contained within what at first sight had seemed to be a few old castle ruins.

It had been easy to imagine the barons of the day, lording it over their guests and impressing them with masses of food and lavish entertainment. On the other hand, it was hard to imagine poor Lady Blanche Arundell, left to defend the castle against all the odds. It's small wonder that she's said to haunt the place, looking down from the tower window and strolling around the grounds by the lake at twilight.

Fortunately, twilight was several hours away, as we returned to the car and prepared to make our way along the rather tortuous, single-track road and back again into civilisation.