

## 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, just begging to be pronounced "Warrdourrr", as in J R R Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* film with its Middle-earth version of "Morrdorrr".

It was therefore with little expectation that we drove to the English Heritage site along a road that was ... unusual. 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 found ourselves on a single-track road that seemed to go on for miles.

It couldn't have been completely wrong, as we eventually arrived at the correct car park. We then went the wrong way on leaving the car and almost ended 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 back to the car park and heading in the opposite direction took us to the small ticket office and shop, where for a modest £4.50 entrance fee, we were each given an audio tour guide – which is what I call excellent value.

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 full-on in my eyes as I attempted to take a photo, which made it very tricky indeed. 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.



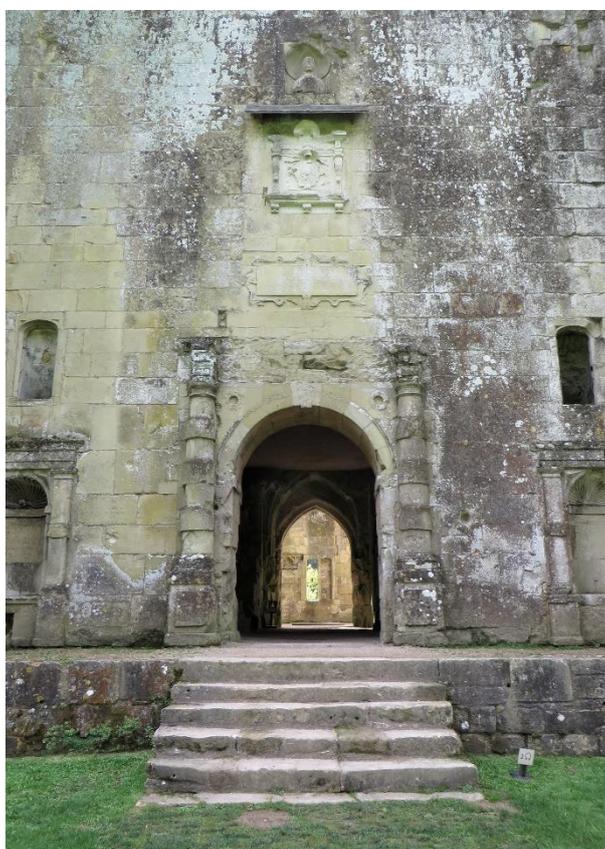
**Warrdourrr!** (Photo by Alan Santillo)

The Saxon kings of Wessex had once occupied the site, but at the time of the Norman Conquest in 1066, it was held for the king by the nuns of Wilton Abbey, a Benedictine convent. Around 200 years later, it came into the ownership of the Calston family and was known as Wardour Manor. In 1386, the heir to the manor, Thomas Calston, sold it to John, 5<sup>th</sup> Lord Lovell (c.1342-1408).

Before I continue, one small question bothers me about Lovell and his family and that is whether their surname is spelt as Lovel or Lovell. Since the latter seems aesthetically more pleasing, I've plumped for that version.

John Lovell was an experienced soldier, having fought in France in the 1360s and also as a mercenary knight in Prussia in the 1370s. He married Maud Holland, a relative of King Richard II, which brought him increased status and wealth, as well the governorship of the royal castle of Devizes in 1381. It therefore followed that he wanted his own castle as a symbol of his success, which led to his purchase of Wardour for £1,000.

He sought and obtained royal permission to build a castle, having acquired a licence for crenellation from King Richard II. According to English Heritage, this splendid edifice was probably designed by William Wynford, who was a well-renowned master mason who'd worked at Windsor Castle in London.



**An imposing entrance**

Built in the fashionable Continental hexagonal style, the design was remarkably symmetrical and unique in Britain. Made with locally quarried Tisbury greensand, the hexagonal castle had a rectangle added to one side, namely the twin-towered entrance. A walled outer precinct echoed the geometrical shape.

It combined comfort and luxury with its inclusion of several self-contained guest suites and would have been enclosed by a dry ditch, fronted by a drawbridge. It thus posed 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.

As I entered, I was astounded at how tall it was, 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.



**Very tall...**

It was decidedly chilly within the walls, but the audio tour held my interest as it guided 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 stayed in the Lovell family until 1461, during the Wars of the Roses (1455-85). The owner then was Francis, 9<sup>th</sup> Baron Lovell (1454-87?), who was a Lancastrian. This resulted in Wardour Castle, along with other Lovell estates, being confiscated by King Edward IV, who reigned from 1461-83.

Francis switched sides to the Yorkists and later became an ally of King Richard III, who reigned from 1483-85. 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.

King Henry VII, the Tudor victor who reigned from 1485-1509, decided to sell Wardour Castle, which was later purchased by Sir Thomas Arundell (c.1502-52), a member of the ancient and prominent Cornish family.

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, who reigned from 1547-53.

Sir Thomas was known as a staunch Roman Catholic and those in power had concerns about his influence and devotion to the old religion. Vague allegations of complicity in the south-west rebellion of 1549 were made and he was subsequently charged with treason and beheaded on Tower Hill in 1552.

Wardour Castle was again confiscated, but was bought back in 1570 by Thomas's son, Sir Matthew Arundell (c.1535-98) 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 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, which would once have been the most inviting part of the castle.

As in the great hall, the rooms were very high, with intricate wooden roofs. Each room would have been graced with two tall windows that looked out onto the landscape, while a third would have looked into the courtyard. By 1605, the upper rooms had been converted into a gallery – that is, one long room with many windows, as was popular on the upper floors of Elizabethan houses. Even then, people aspired 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, who reigned from 1558-1603.

In 1588, he donated £100 towards the defeat of the Spanish Armada. In 1605, King James I, who reigned from 1603-25, created him 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Arundell of Wardour, although he was briefly suspected of complicity in the Gunpowder Plot. In the 1630s, he was in acrimonious dispute with the Bishop of Durham and in 1637, he tried 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 (who reigned from 1625-49) during the Civil War (1642-51). 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) 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. 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.1607-94), 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.

Still from the lofty heights of Old Wardour Castle, we gazed through a window aperture towards New Wardour Castle, which was nestling a mere 1.5 miles/2 kilometres 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 perhaps not...



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

It was still fairly sunny amid the clouds, so we strolled down to the banqueting house overlooking the lake. 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 is a venue for wedding ceremonies in the hall that's graced with beautiful stained-glass windows. For us, it offered a small exhibition on the history of the gardens.



**West view of Old Wardour**

Once outside again, we walked back up towards the old castle and discovered there was a good view (as above) 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, as well as nowadays for civil marriage ceremonies on offer within the castle and banqueting house.

According to our slightly longwinded audio guide, we weren't finished yet and dutifully made our way around the outside of the castle on our way 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*. Meanwhile, New Wardour Castle had played its part as the dance school in the 2000 film *Billy Elliot*.

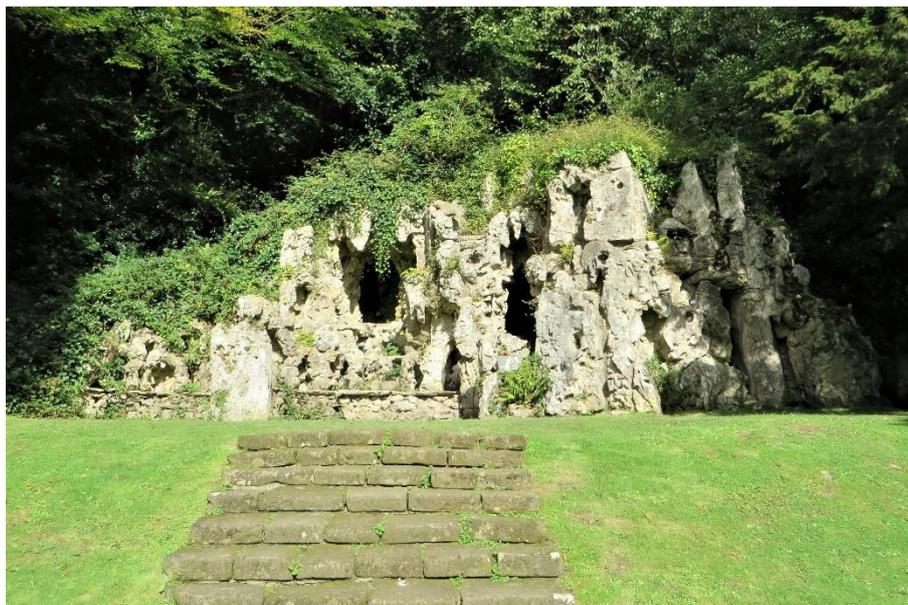


**A not quite as romantic aspect of Old Warrdour**

The grotto was located at the northern end of the property, having been 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 historical sacrilege and archaeological 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, which is hardly fitting for their significance. The now ravaged Tisbury stone circle and henge was thought to have been erected in the Bronze Age.

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.



**Steps leading up to the grotto**

It had been quite 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 therefore small wonder that she is believed to haunt the place, looking down from the tower window and at other times strolling around the grounds by the lake at twilight.

Fortunately or otherwise, twilight was still several hours away, as we meandered back to the car and prepared to make our way again along the rather tortuous, single-track road in order to re-enter civilisation. We'd enjoyed our time out!

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