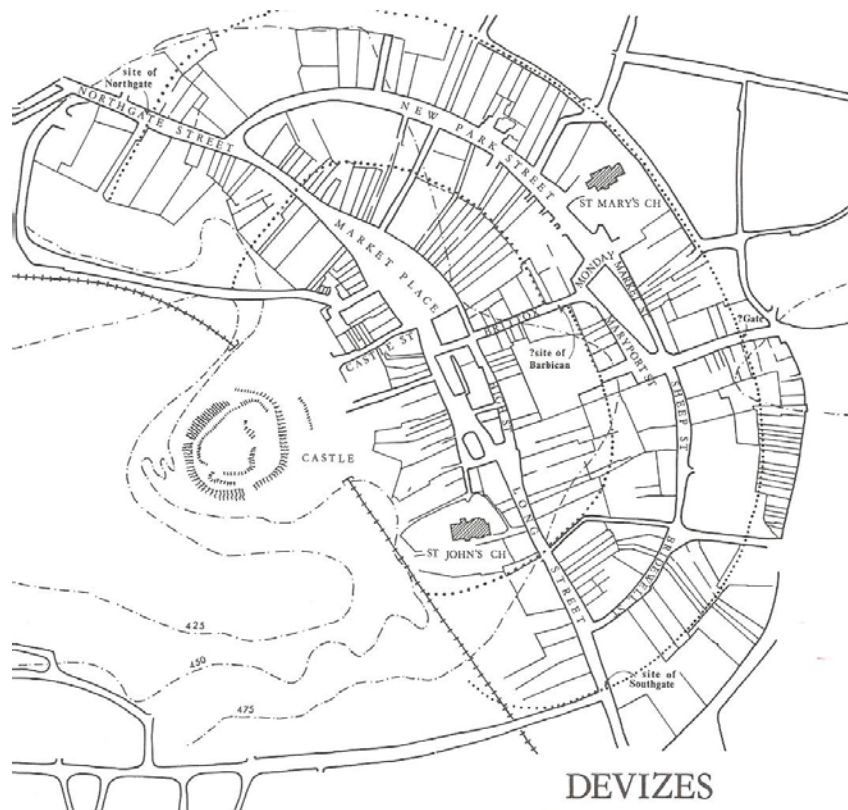


Devizes, Wiltshire: archaeology and history (notes for visitors, prepared by the Royal Archaeological Institute, 2017)

Devizes is located on an outcrop of upper greensand that edges the chalk plain and overlooks the steep descent into the clay vale. It was not an eleventh-century borough, but was probably created by Bishop Roger of Salisbury, who in c. 1120 built a castle, replacing one said to have been burnt in 1113, but which is not otherwise known. Nothing of the keep or other inner buildings is now visible, although one twelfth-century writer claimed it to be the finest castle in Europe, and even in the early sixteenth century the castle was described as ‘so costly and strongly was never afor nor since set up by any bishop of England’. Part of the cost was the very large enclosed deer park on the west side.

Bishop Roger would also have seen that there was potential for a large and profitable borough attached to his castle. The place-name Devizes has always been taken to derive from Old French, ultimately Latin *divisas*, i.e. divided between two manors, Potterne and Cannings, both held by the bishops, but it might refer to a cross-roads, sited to the east of the later town where the road north from Salisbury met one that followed the scarp between the chalk and the clay. These good communication lines may have been a reason for both castle and town.

Interpretations of the very distinctive town plan of Devizes vary (map from Haslam 1976, 78). Unusually, it has two market-places, the Monday market to the east, a rectangular area now largely



encroached upon, and the Market Place to the west, which has also been encroached upon at its High Street end. The markets are in two different parishes, the Monday market in St Mary's, the other in St John's; both are close to the churches, which would have blessed their affairs and benefited from thank-offerings from traders and visitors. Both churches have stone-vaulted chancels with Romanesque work;

both might have been begun by Bishop Roger before his death in 1139; the monstrous carvings in the corbel-table in St John's have recently been compared to work of the first half of the twelfth century (Woodcock and Marchant Oakley 2006, 252). Neither church shows any evidence of earlier building on their sites.

The medieval town was surrounded by a curved bank and ditch, not now visible but marked by the St Mary's parish boundary; excavation near its south end in 1974 established that it had been a formidable defence, with a ditch about 5 metres deep (Haslam 1977/78). More problematic is whether the parish boundary between St Mary's and St John's marks the line of a second, inner bank and ditch, enclosing the outer bailey of the castle; excavation in 2006-7 may have located the ditch, and the street named The Brittox may show its existence, if the word derives from 'bretasche', meaning a stockade of some sort. The parish boundary veers northwards at its southern end; an inner ditch would only make sense if it continued south of St John's church to complete the semi-circle (as shown by the dotted line on the map by Jeremy Haslam). The parish boundary line is shown by the backs of some of the property boundaries, but they do not show a void between them and the backs of properties fronting New Park Street, as might be expected if there had been a ditch and bank. Furthermore, the space available for the St Mary's part of the original borough would have been very limited if it had been squeezed between the inner and outer banks, assuming that both were part of the original lay-out.

Three interpretations have been advanced to explain this dilemma. One is that St Mary's Monday market-place was the earlier of the two, with the St John's market-place being later, created after the castle had ceased to have political significance, and its outer bailey was no longer maintained. On that argument, St John's church would originally have been within the castle's outer bailey, and could even have served as its chapel. Certainly its tower and chancel would seem to reflect the architectural ambition of Bishop Roger. Furthermore, the Monday market-place was referred to as the 'old' market in the fourteenth century, the inner one as 'new' (VCH 1975, 2-3 and 6-9).

A second possibility reverses the argument: the market-place represented by High Street/Market Place/St John's Street was deliberately built within the castle's outer bailey, as protection, and the success of the town very soon led to its extension, with the Monday market then being set up, overseen by St Mary's (Butler 1976, 45). On that argument, St John's would have been both castle chapel and parish church.

A third possibility is that the town was founded from the start with two market-places, each overseen by a parish church; that the castle had a much smaller perimeter, with a gate probably in Castle Street; and that there was no bank and ditch on the parish boundary line. The castle did not need a defence on that line because the town's outer defence served for both. Against that is St Mary's market being called 'old', and that no other medieval town is known to have been set up with two market-places. Nor is it certain when either ecclesiastical building became a parish church; both were called *capelle* in 1226-8, implying that they were not yet independent of the older foundation at Bishop's Cannings.



Whatever the early history, Devizes has signs of prosperity in the later Middle Ages, notably in a number of buildings, such as the fine timber-framed cross-wing house fronting the Monday market (photograph by courtesy of John Hare). Encroachment into that market's open space may indicate market stalls becoming permanent features; the map shows how those properties do not have back gardens, unlike the 'burgage tenements' fronting the main streets. One end of the High

Street market-place has also been infilled, a row of jettied houses being dated by dendrochronology to the 1460s. They too do not have any space behind them. The open gutter in the lane would have been a common feature in medieval towns (photograph by courtesy of Mike Efstathiou).

Both churches were expanded, St Mary's with a nave, side aisles and a fine western tower in the fifteenth century (the photograph below shows how New Park Street follows the curving line of the outer defence, with the tower of St Mary's at the end: photograph by Maurice Pulling, reproduced under common licence agreement CC-BY-SA 2.0, accessed from Wikimedia) . St John's has an unusual rectangular tower of the same date as the chancel with its flat buttresses. The church was favoured by the Mayor and corporation for their chantry, and two ornate chapels were added in the fifteenth century, and the nave was rebuilt (Chandler and Parker 2006: photograph as above). The cloth industry underlay this prosperity.



Cloth production also kept Devizes going in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with roles in general commerce and local government. Related to Devizes's continuing market function are the Georgian town hall and inns, eighteenth-century prosperity also reflected in several houses. The town developed industrially in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. John Anstie's textile workshop was built in 1784 in the Georgian style, with four floors for looms well-lit by sash windows. It was the last to be constructed for hand- or foot-powered machinery; water-wheels were already the norm where available, and steam was soon to offer an alternative. The owner had a smart house near-by, there being no need for the social separation that the dirt and noise of heavy machinery was to cause later. The Kennet and Avon Canal, where one of the wharf buildings houses the museum run by the Canal Trust, was opened in 1796. Barges had to ascend from the level of the River Avon at Bath through a series of locks, notably the flight of sixteen about a mile from Devizes. Nearby is Wadworth's brewery, with a fine Victorian brick-built water-tower, symbolic of new industries replacing textiles. Tobacco was ground into snuff by windmills on the castle earthworks, but was mechanized in the 1830s with a factory in New Park Street (on the right in the photograph). A fine façade was added in 1894, its elaborate tympanum and the name Snuff Street being reminders of this now esoteric tobacco product.

The Wiltshire Museum, Devizes. By David Dawson

The Wiltshire Museum is run by the county archaeological society, which in 1853 initiated the annual journal that it still publishes, and declared its intention to open a museum. After a series of temporary homes, the ambition was achieved in 1874 by purchasing the Georgian grammar school, to which a formal Gothic entrance-way was added to give the right formality and to show that the principles of Christian instruction were to be pursued within. The Museum's current collecting policy focuses on northern Wiltshire, and it is best known nationally for its prehistoric artefacts, notably gold and amber from Bush Barrow and Upton Lovell, though the Anglo-Saxon material is also important. The Museum was able to reorganize its display of the former thanks to a Heritage Lottery Fund grant, opening its new Prehistoric Wiltshire Galleries in 2013.



A newly acquired Anglo-Saxon seventh-century gold pommel from the top of the handle of a sword, found near Cricklade. The panel contains very fine gold filigree wire soldered to the surface, forming two continuous loops. It is very similar to pommels in the Staffordshire hoard discovered in 2009 (reproduced by courtesy of the Wiltshire Museum: centimetre scale).

References and further reading:

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These notes were originally prepared for the annual summer meeting of the Royal Archaeological Institute held in July 2016; see www.royalarchinst.org for further information. RAI members have access to the printed Report which contains syntheses of the significance of recent research to archaeological understanding of the county. The notes on Devizes town were prepared by John Hare, David A. Hinton and Tim Tatton-Brown. The RAI is grateful to David Dawson, the Wiltshire Museum director, for his contribution, and for guiding members round the museum during the visit. Other on-line entries can be accessed through the RAI web-site.