



Marketplace Project

Mark Brandon 2026

Famous writers who came to or lived in Salisbury

Charles Dickens (1812 - 1870) wrote *Martin Chuzzlewit* and painted this scene of the market in the 'fair old city': 'It was filled with carts, horses, donkeys, baskets, wagons, garden stuff, meat, tripe, pies, poultry and ruckster's wares of every opposite description and possible variety of character. Then there were young farmers and old farmers with smock frocks, brown greatcoats, drab greatcoats, red worsted comforters, leather leggings, wonderful shaped hats, hunting whips, and rough sticks, standing in groups, or talking noisily together on the tavern steps, or paying and receiving huge amounts of greasy wealth, with the assistance of such bulky pocket books that when they were in their pockets it was apoplexy to get them out, and when they were out it was spasms to get them in again.'

Also there were farmers' wives in beaver bonnets and red cloaks, riding shaggy horses purged of all earthly passions, who went soberly into all manner of places without desiring to know why, and who, if required, would have stood stock still in a china shop, with a complete dinner service at each hoof. Also, a great many dogs which were interested in the state of the market and the bargains of their masters; and a great confusion of tongues, both brute and human.' Tom Pinch however 'regarded everything exposed for sale with great delight, and was particularly struck by the itinerant cutlery, which he considered of the very keenest kind, insomuch that he purchased a pocket knife with seven blades in it, and not a cut (as he afterwards found out) among them.'

Some authors had to disguise where they were writing about: Anthony Trollope's Barchester, Thomas Hardy's Melchester and Ken Follett's Kingsbridge.

Anthony Trollope (1815 - 1882) had the idea for *The Warden* (1855) when visiting Salisbury whilst working for the General Post Office. He began writing it in 1852:

...'more than twelve months since I had stood for an hour on the little bridge in Salisbury, and had made out to my own satisfaction the spot on which Hiram's hospital should stand.'

Edith Olivier (1872 - 1948) was a Wilton writer and hostess to the 'bright young things' of the interwar years. These included Rex Whistler, Cecil Beaton, Siegfried Sassoon and Stephen Tennant (1906 - 1987). Tennant inherited Wilsford Manor and became something of a recluse in his latter years. His flamboyant presence in dramatic attire became something of a fixture as he regularly brought the Salisbury traffic to a halt. One of Stephen Tennant's tenants was the West Indian writer V S Naipaul who wrote of his bus journeys into Salisbury, in his 1987 novel *The Enigma of Arrival*.

Thomas Hardy (1840 - 1928) loved Salisbury from his first visit, aged 19. Two of his sisters went to the teachers training college. In *Jude the Obscure* Hardy described the market place's bustling fun-fair and livestock markets.

William Golding (1911 - 1993) worked as a teacher at Bishop Wordsworth's Grammar School where the students were supposed to have inspired his *Lord of the Flies*.

Virgin Soldiers author **Leslie Thomas** (1931 - 2014), who lived in the Close, wrote 'I go out for a walk everyday and meet at least six people I know. It is like a village round here.' which is no doubt why it's local name is Smallsbury.

Dorothy L Sayers (1893 - 1957) was educated at Godolphin School and in her first Peter Wimsey novel, *Whose Body*, the detective travels to Salisbury and dines at the Minster (Cathedral) Hotel. She also wrote 'As in all cathedral cities, the atmosphere of the Close pervades every nook and corner of Salisbury, and no food in that city but seems faintly flavoured with prayer-books.'

William Shakespeare (1564 - 1616) we know stayed at The George (now the Boston Tea Party) when taking his players to Wilton House. He also performed *As You Like It* for King James I.

Edward Rutherford (1948 -) was born in Salisbury and in his novel *Sarum* he uses the city as a microcosm of England.

Other A-listers such as Henry Fielding (1707 - 1754), Siegfried Sassoon, Vikram Seth, T E Lawrence, Sting (musician and songwriter) and Cecil Beaton (photographer, designer and diarist) lived locally, knew the city well but did not as far as we know write about it.

As an aside: on the death of Lawrence of Arabia in 1935, well-known figures such as George Bernard Shaw and Winston Churchill organised a national tribute in the form of a bronze bust by his friend and sculptor Eric Kennington. Eric also sculpted a life-size stone effigy in full Arab kit which was offered to Salisbury Cathedral but which was refused!!!! It can be found in St Martin on the Walls church in Wareham.



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