

Salisbury Cathedral Close Preservation Society

"*Rus In Urbe*"

BULLETIN NO. 4

Prologue.

1. It was the publication in February 1991 of the Rothermel Thomas Report on the conservation and management of The Close that prompted the formation of the Society. In years to come that catalytic function may be seen as the report's most useful outcome.

2. Examination of the deficiencies of the Rothermel Thomas report has occupied much of the Society's time since then—inevitably because of the exaggerated commendation of it by the Cathedral authorities, who went so far as to express their complete confidence in its impartiality and integrity. This Society represents the views of those who believe that the report deserves a more critical approach.

3. In the centuries since The Close was laid out, around 1220 AD, its appearance has changed slowly, or sometimes abruptly, as when James Wyatt re-designed the churchyard and removed the bell tower. The predominant feature of the domestic buildings in The Close is now Georgian. The Royal Commission on Historical Monuments' study of The Close, to be published later this year, will give general access to the treasures that lie behind these elegant facades. During the present century there have been a number of schemes for the management and conservation of The Close, as distinct from the Cathedral, of which the most comprehensive was the Brandt Potter Hare report of 1971, 'Salisbury Close, Problems and Possibilities, an Architectural and Landscape Analysis', commissioned by the Dean and Chapter but never made available to the public. It foreshadowed many of the proposals of the Rothermel Thomas report.

4. Why was it not until 1991 that it became important to form a society to protect The Close? To answer this it is necessary to compare the Cathedral's fundamental purpose with that as perceived by the Rothermel Thomas report:

For all its magnificence as one of the great achievements of medieval faith, design and craftsmanship, the Cathedral is in some ways an obsolete building for many of the religious and secular activities it has to accommodate. [2.3]

Some lines by John Betjeman come to mind:

And ev'ry old cathedral that you enter
By then will be an Area Culture Centre.
Instead of nonsense about Death and Heaven
Lectures on civic duty will be given;
Eurhythmic classes dancing round the spire,
And economics courses in the choir.

5. In the Charge following his Visitation of the Cathedral in October 1991 the Bishop of Salisbury spotlighted the concern that those responsible have felt "about the Cathedral's role and management amid the pressures and opportunities of today's fast changing world, its financial viability and its future development" [2]. He warned against the danger of succumbing in the face of these realities to the temptation of seeing the Cathedral's cultural drawing power as a major means of financing its work. "As soon as that happens, the need for money begins to control decision-making and to determine priorities" [3].

6. However, as the Rothermel Thomas report points out:

The Cathedral...is a part of our common cultural, artistic and architectural heritage within its own right. This building and

its setting is the destination of about half a million people a year who wish to visit it. [2.3]

The problem of tourism has become increasingly obtrusive here as so often elsewhere. Lord St John of Fawsley, in an important article in **The Times** in 1989, pointed out that since the cathedrals lost their endowments in the 1830s,

Effectively the harrassed deans have only two sources of cash available, public appeals and mass tourism ... Tourism undoubtedly helps, but it also has its hazards. Mass tourism can reach the point where it destroys the loveliness being sought. In its wake come disfiguring detritus, plastic chairs, concert platforms, television lights, shops, bazaars and lavatories.

7. Lord St John proposed a Cathedral Foundation, state funded and charged with the duty of assisting cathedrals to meet their burdens. Happily, a move in that direction has recently been made and the government has recognised a responsibility to provide assistance. Yet the question remains whether the present administrations of the cathedrals are best constituted and equipped to deal with the manifold practical and financial problems that now beset them. In an interesting series of articles in **The Guardian** in 1991, Walter Schwarz reported on the problems of five of the great English cathedrals, Salisbury the last. The Dean of Winchester observed that 80% of his time was spent in dealing with money, adding: "I can only keep that up for a short time. I am trained in theology and, essentially, am a writer". In the same series the Dean of Salisbury confessed: "At heart I'm a simple parish priest, I'd no idea what I was taking on". The Dean of Winchester summed up the problems of all cathedrals: a medieval administrative structure having to cope with a crumbling fabric, a flow of tourists and shortage of funds. Or, as Mr Schwarz, reporting on Worcester, put it, "an administrative system designed to allow the dean and chapter to conduct worship, care for pilgrims and discipline recalcitrant monks, but not run a multi-million pound enterprise".

8. While the interest of central organizations in the problems of conserving national treasures is welcome it is not without its problems. The hierarchical structure of these bodies tends to concentrate power in the hands of a few individuals whose views are not always sensitive to the concerns of those with an interest in a particular locality.

9. With these many cross currents bearing on The Close it is scarcely surprising that a society dedicated to its protection should have been found necessary. It is not its function to seek to usurp the role of any of the bodies that have official responsibilities for either the Cathedral or The Close. Its strength is precisely that it can take a wider view than some of these. It serves to represent the interest of those, where ever they may be, who know and cherish The Close, and to ensure that transitory pressures do not expose it to irreparable damage. Vigilance is needed to ensure that this precious environment is not lost.

10. To end his memorable presentation, 'A Muse of Fire', in the Cathedral in 1988, Alan Bates recited the vivid contemporary account of how, on 21st June 1741, the tower of the Cathedral was struck by lightning and the timber framework inside it was set alight, and how the Cathedral was saved from fire by the heroic efforts of the common people of Salisbury. It is in the same spirit that this Society aims to serve The Close.

11. Meeting of the Full Planning Committee on 8th April 1992.

Many thanks to all those who wrote to the Planning Department of Salisbury District Council expressing concern about the District Planning Officer's recommendation that councillors should express support in principal for Option Two of the Rothermel Thomas report. Over a 100 letters of objection were received.

At the meeting the Councillors decided that they did not wish to discuss the Rothermel Thomas report or recommendations until a formal planning application had been made and declined to accept Option Two in principal. Whether and when a planning application will be made is uncertain but you will, of course, be kept informed.

12. SCCPS Exhibition at Salisbury Public Library.

Throughout the month of June there will be an exhibition about the Society in the foyer of Salisbury Public Library. It will deal with the Society's aims, the main proposals in the Rothermel Thomas report and the SCCPS proposals for the Close. We hope that members will encourage many others to visit this exhibition.

13. Traffic Survey of the Close by Bristol Polytechnic.

In Bulletin No.3 we mentioned that the Dean and Chapter had commissioned a traffic survey of the Close (November 1991). The results have now been published. One of the survey's main observations was that "...the special character of the Cathedral Close is in danger of being eroded by a sea of cars". (6.11) The survey makes a very useful contribution to the debate and the SCCPS generally welcomes its findings. The surveyors have recommended that parking in the Close be reduced by about 50%. This could be achieved by ending public car-parking there, as is advocated by the SCCPS and the Salisbury Civic Society.

14. SCCPS Suggested Scheme of Traffic Management for the Close.

From the outset the Society has contended that no satisfactory report on the management or conservation of The Close could be achieved unless it was based on the findings of a traffic survey conducted in accordance with well-established principals. Interestingly, Mr James Thomas, in the Addendum of last September to his report, seemed to recognise this [Addendum 4.5]. Though often pressed to do so, the Society resolutely resisted the temptation to put forward such a scheme in the absence of such a survey. Now that the Bristol Polytechnic Study of traffic on The Close has been published the Society has felt it right to put forward a suggested scheme of traffic management for The Close, while emphasising that we are not traffic experts. We have suggested to the Cathedral's administration that professionals should be commissioned to prepare a detailed study. Again Mr Thomas seems to agree, though predictably, he adds that a traffic management scheme would not replace the need, as he sees it, for a new access route. The essentials of the Society's suggested scheme may be summarised as follows:

- (a) Unnecessary public car parking would be eliminated, just as it is in most other cathedral closes in the country. Provision would naturally be made for disabled visitors and those attending services at the Cathedral.
- (b) Traffic that had to use The Close would be allowed in and out through the High Street Gate.
- (c) Vehicles entering and leaving through the High Street Gate would be controlled by traffic lights to ensure an alternating one-way flow.
- (d) As well as using the High Street Gate as an exit, cars and some vans could leave through the Harnham Gate as they do at present, or through St Ann's Gate, possibly restricted to peak use times.
- (e) The exit through St Ann's Gate would be controlled by traffic lights; lights here have been recommended on the 1990 TPA 'Study of Traffic in Salisbury', commissioned by Wiltshire County Council.
- (f) To encourage motor traffic using the High Street Gate to do so slowly, a traffic calming plateau should be formed in the road under and on either side of the arch. This plateau would not adversely affect the present clearance under the High Street Gate.
- (g) Height detectors should be positioned on the approach roads, New Street and Crane Street, to ensure that vehicles which were too tall would be warned not even to attempt to turn into the High Street approach to The Close.
- (h) Particularly in the early evening, The Close is used by some as a short cut. To stop this the use of the Harnham Gate should be denied to motor traffic between 5 and 6.30pm.
- (i) In emergencies the Bishop's (otherwise the Palace or Queen's) Gate should be used if the normal entrances to The Close were unusable.

If you would like to receive a copy of the SCCPS **Suggested Scheme for Traffic Management** please write to the Secretary. The following comment on the proposal from Dr M.Jenks Dip.Arch, FRSA may be of interest. Dr Jenks is an architect, a specialist consultant in traffic calming design and pedestrian safety issues and who has given advice to the Department of Transport and the Transport and Road Research Laboratory:

The ideas on traffic in the Close of the Salisbury Cathedral Close Preservation Society start from the correct premise of traffic constraint and management. They should be taken as a starting point for a more detailed feasibility study and design proposals. This could provide a more environmentally sound and cost-effective alternative to the Rothermel Thomas proposals concerning roads and parking. Controlling traffic by design and using strategies such as those suggested by the Salisbury Cathedral Close Preservation Society, would positively enhance the Close environment. The national and international importance of the Close calls for the adoption of such a pioneering and enlightened approach to solving its problems through good design.

**15. Coffee Morning in the garden of at Braybrooke House,
57, The Close.**

Mrs Christopherson has very kindly offered to open her garden in aid of the Society on Tuesday, 7th July 1992 between 10am and 12 noon. We do hope you will be able to attend and make the event a success.

16. Membership Subscriptions.

Unless you have joined the SCCPS since January 1992, your subscription is due for renewal on 1st June this year. The rates are £3.00 per person p.a. or £5.00 per household p.a. Donations will of course be gratefully received. The committee takes this opportunity of thanking all those who have been so generous with financial support over the past year. You have all helped set up a very lively Society which has certainly established itself as a safeguard for the future of Salisbury Close. We hope you will continue to be members.

Please complete the slip at the bottom of this page, tear it off and send it with your subscription to Mrs P.Cusack, Membership Secretary, Salisbury Cathedral Close Preservation Society, 11 Ayleswade Rd., Salisbury SP2 8DW. Thank you.

STOP PRESS!

From **The Times** for 29th April 1992 (p.4 c.g):

Cathedral road

A decision about building an access road into the Cathedral Close at Salisbury is not expected to be made this year while more talks take place with interested parties. The cathedral's chapter office said yesterday that any planning application had been "put on the back burner".

Rejoice - but keep your powder dry!

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