Salisbury Cathedral Close Preservation Society

"Rus In Urbe"

Bulletin No. 8 - June 1994.

1. Introduction

Early in the thirteenth century some marshy land in a bend of the Avon was designated as the Close of the new Salisbury Cathedral. Over the intervening centuries these 83 acres have acquired a special place in the minds and hearts of those who know the Close, far though they may be from it. Thus it is that the Society has members in many distant parts of the world. They, no less than members nearer to Salisbury, have seen the need for an organisation dedicated to the protection of this cherished place.

The two particular matters that have claimed the Committee's attention in the months since the issue of Bulletin No. 7 are traffic management in, and the enhancement of, the Close.

2. Traffic Management.

The experimental scheme for school traffic implemented by the Cathedral authorities last January was discussed at a meeting convened by Brigadier Owen, the Chapter Clerk, in February. From 10 to 28 January the North Gate was closed to outgoing traffic between the hours of 8.15 and 9.0 am and again between 3.30 and 4.30 pm, and all such traffic left the Close through the Harnham Gate. This did cause some congestion in de Vaux Place and at the Exeter Street roundabout. The Chapter Clerk received only a small number of comments on this experiment. Predictably, those in favour were chiefly residents, those against mainly parents of children attending schools in the Close. A number of suggestions for future action to be taken by the Chapter Clerk were adopted at the meeting.

The Society's own Working Party met three times since the issue of the last Bulletin, and the Committee has also considered the subject. As a result the Chapter Clerk has been reminded of the Society's recommendation of March 1992 that the St. Ann's Gate should be used as an exit for school traffic. This would only be feasible if traffic lights were to be installed at the junction outside the Gate. The 'Study of Traffic in Salisbury' of May 1990, commissioned by Wiltshire County Council, recommended two primary options for traffic management schemes for the centre of Salisbury, both of which called for traffic lights at the junction.

A suggestion originally made by the Working Party is also being examined. This would provide for a permanent diversion round the Cathedral Works Department, which would enable school traffic in the Close to leave it via the Bishop's Walk, the Palace grounds, the Broad Walk and the Harnham Gate. Such a scheme is dependent on the willingness of the County Council to take essential traffic management measures in St. Nicholas Road. A third possibility, also proposed by the Working Party, is for a setting-down and picking-up point for school traffic in Exeter Street. The problem with that is that Exeter Street is the only way in and out of the City on the south side and is consequently one of the busiest streets in Salisbury at the times, especially in the morning, when children are being brought to and taken from the Close schools.

The Salisbury District Plan, shortly to go to inquiry, provides (policy TR10) that the local planning authority (the District Council) in conjunction with the highway authority (the County Council) will introduce new traffic management measures in Salisbury City Centre. In anticipation of this a Joint Authority Steering Group, composed of four District Council members and four County Council members, supported by a District/County officer working group, has been formed. It will report to the Planning Committee of the District Council and the Transport & Highways Committee of the County Council. A consultative panel, reflecting local interests, has also been formed with a view to reaching a consensus of view on matters where there might be a conflict of interest. The Cathedral authorities are represented on the panel and the Committee hopes to make some input to the panel through them.

3. Enhancement of the Close.

The idea that the Society should contribute to the positive enhancement of the Close was well supported at the last AGM. Accordingly the Committee has considered ways in which this might be done. An initial opportunity for a practical contribution arose when the removal of some diseased tree stumps and their replacements were paid for by the Society. A longer term project is also under consideration. Early in the 19th century Cornish elms were planted round the churchyard in the Close. Those who remember them confirm, as do photographs, that these majestic trees contributed greatly to the atmosphere of the Close. Some of them had had tobe replaced by young elms in 1954, but in the early 1970s all the elms were ravaged by Dutch elm disease and had to be felled. The Committee and the Cathedral authorities

have been examining a plan to mark the millenium by planting small-leaved limes (Tilia cordata) in place of the lost Cornish elms.

The Committee has also been active in regard to minor ways of enhancing the Close and its environs, such as the resurfacing of the Broad Walk, the lighting in de Vaux Place and St. Nicholas Road, and the cleaning of the inscription commemorating Bishop Bingham on the Ayleswade Bridge.

4. The Houses of the Close.

This valuable book, the result of twenty years' work by the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, was finally published last June. It provides an indispensable guide to the history of the houses in the Close. Copies of it may be borrowed from the Honorary Secretary.

5. Officers of the Society.

Mrs. Sybil Shean and Mrs. Pam Cusack resigned their offices of respectively, Honorary Treasurer and Honorary Membership Secretary last March.. The Society has reason to be grateful to these two ladies for their generous and efficient service on its behalf. Mr. Christopher Dragonetti has taken over as Honorary Treasurer and Mrs. Brenda MacKechnie-Jarvis as Honorary Membership Secretary.