

Jellicoe Urban Landscape Under Threat

John Clark, GHS Conservation Officer, SouthWest Region

Plans to 'modernise' the cathedral precinct in Exeter have highlighted growing concerns about the unprotected nature of such spaces, which can tend to be overlooked during the listing process.

In the case of Exeter's Cathedral Close, and following discussions with Jonathan Lovie (GHS Principal Conservation Officer, England), I wrote to English Heritage on 16 March 2009 to request that they assess the Cathedral Close (or Green) for inclusion on the *Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest*.

The principal interest of the designed landscape of the Cathedral Close today is the contribution made by Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe in 1974. All the elements of the Jellicoe scheme survive essentially intact and it is on the basis of the quality of this scheme that we asked for its assessment. The design is an important example of his work in an urban context, where he sought to provide an appropriate setting to a significant building. Unlike many comparable examples of his work, the Cathedral Close survives substantially intact and remains a highly effective designed landscape.

Coincidentally the C20 Society had requested that the War Memorial by Sir Edwin Lutyens (we had presumed, wrongly, that it was already listed) and the

Processional Way by Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe should be listed.

On 16 April 2009, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, on the advice of EH added the Devon County War Memorial and the Processional Way to the *List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest* at Grade II*. The reasons for designation include the statement 'Jellicoe's landscape design for the cathedral green uses the Processional Way to enhance the important alignment of the war memorial with Exeter Cathedral's west end and altar.'

On 21 April EH wrote to the Society to say that they had decided that Cathedral Close falls short of being of national importance and does not merit inclusion on the *Register*. Whilst the Grade II* listing gives statutory protection, in our opinion, the listing does not adequately recognise the landscape significance of the site.

The Close has a long and complex historic development. From at least 1270, the Close was main burial ground of Exeter, and it is still consecrated ground. There are references to it being levelled soon after 1637, so presumably that is when it started to become an ornamental/recreational landscape. It is clear that in the C18 it was being used at least in part as public walks with tree-lined paths, some of which



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A pre-WWII aerial photograph shows Exeter's Cathedral Close in its wider urban setting

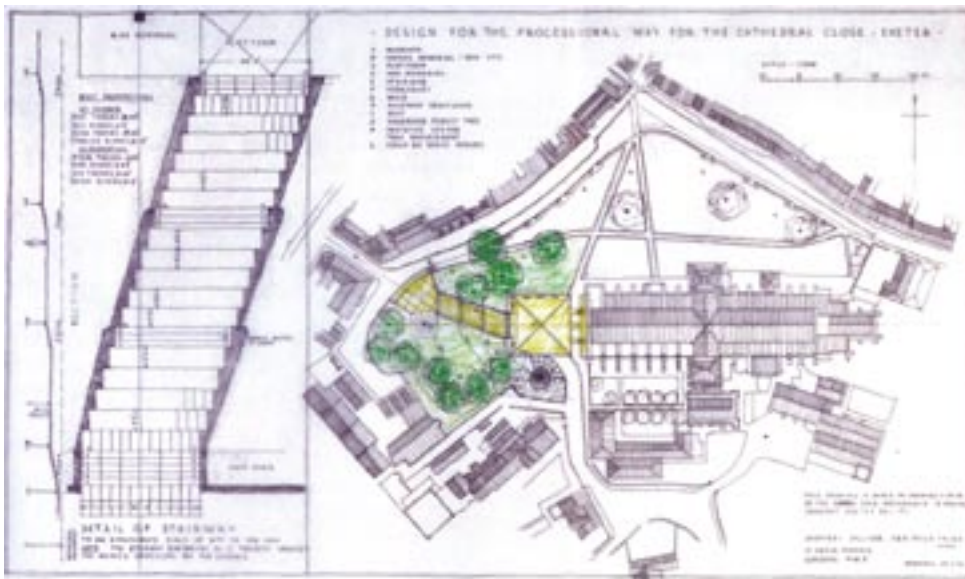
dictated the line of the paths today.

The Close is a superb designed landscape comprising many elements: listed buildings (many Grade I & II*), the Hooker statue, the original old river-stone paving extending along The Close & New Cut, on under the Mayor Patch Bridge spanning the City Wall, to Southernhay, all of a high quality. It is of special historic and archaeological interest as an ancient burial ground with underlying archaeology from the Roman and Saxon periods.

It is interesting to note the following quotation from Thomas Sharp's plan, *Exeter Phoenix a plan for rebuilding* (Architectural Press, 1946): 'The Close at Exeter has a peculiar quality of personality that is hard to define, impossible not to be aware of, difficult to get away from. There are many solid, beautiful, quaint old-world and historic squares in England: but there are very few gay ones. ... the general effect is, like that of the front at Brighton, gay. Almost continentally so.'

Thomas Sharp also advocated the removal of St Mary Major Church, which he described as 'an Imposing Ecclesiastical Edifice whose tower vies with the Cathedral in size but not in looks... This Edifice, it is hoped, will eventually be removed, the Cathedral authorities being themselves alive to its unsuitability'.

St Mary Major was eventually demolished in 1971 and the City's Archaeological Field Unit carried out a major excavation, finding the Saxon Minster and the Roman Bathhouse & Basilica. By the time the



Exeter's principal feature is undoubtedly the stepped Processional Way. Very subtle variations in step width and riser height make the whole much more complex than usual, giving a very understated approach from Cathedral 'forecourt' to War Memorial. The controlled use of 'desire line' paths in the remaining open space is very Jellicoe, apparently so simple that the design almost escapes notice...

archaeologists had completed their work, in 1974, the whole area was a complete visual disaster with cars parked everywhere; outside the West Front, in Little Style and under the elms along Cathedral Yard.

The City Planning Department and the Dean & Chapter worked closely together on a comprehensive regeneration for the Close. A scheme to landscape the site of St Mary Major and the area in front of the West Front was prepared by the Dean and Chapter's architects (Gundry Dyer Partnership). The City Planning Department & the Royal Fine Art Commission felt that the Cathedral Close merited more sympathetic consideration, so the Dean and Chapter were persuaded to commission Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe, as an eminent landscape architect, to prepare a landscape scheme for the Close.

The letter from EH seems to imply that because they believe (wrongly) that Jellicoe did not redesign the rest of the Close then it is of no consequence. 'The layout of the Cathedral Close in Exeter has survived well, but is nevertheless very plain. Jellicoe's proposals clearly show that he proposed to retain the existing layout. The focus of his proposal was the Processional Way, and his proposals for further landscaping of the Close, apart from some suggestions for tree replacement, are minimal'.

This is factually incorrect as Jellicoe's scheme was for the **whole** of the Close. I have personal knowledge of the events of the 1970s and remember most of what happened, even though it was 35 years ago. I worked in the Exeter City Planning Department and was involved in the discussions with Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe.

The Processional Way was one part of the comprehensive scheme which saw the car parking removed, an extended Green, a new stone wall along the entire length of the Green, and repaved surfaces in front of the Royal Clarence Hotel.

John Sales (GHS vice-president, who has written management plans for most, but not all, of the English Bishops' Palace gardens) said that in his view many cathedral precincts require to be looked at in their entirety for the *Register*. This was certainly how Peterborough was registered; i.e. the Close, the Palace garden and other designed spaces and burial grounds around the cathedral. He felt this was true of Exeter.

The Garden History Society believes that the Cathedral Precincts comprising the Close, together with the Cloisters and Bishops Palace, is of special historic interest in the national context, and therefore merits inclusion on the *Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest*. We have asked the Secretary of State to review the decision, as we believe that the decision by EH has been wrongly made.

events: details in *NEWS* 83 or on www.gardenhistorysociety.org
places are still available on the GHS events listed below

GHS & NT Celebratory Conference
Graham Stuart Thomas: The Life and Works of a 20th Century Horticultural Icon
Potters Heron Hotel, Ampfield & Mottisfont
9.45am, Thursday 18 June

£60. Applications (with SAE) to
Anne Richards, 5 The Knoll, Hereford
HR1 1RU, or phone: 01432 354 479

GHSS visit to Bonnington House
Saturday 4 July

£15, includes lunch. Contact Sue Hewer
by email: suehewer1@btopenworld.com
phone: 01575 560 259, or (with SAE) to:
Clintlaw Farmhouse, Lintrathen, Kirriemuir,
Angus DD8 5JF

**GHS visit to Virginia Water
& the Savill Gardens**
with London Parks and Gardens Trust
Wednesday 8 July

£30, includes lunch. Contact Robert Peel:
rma.peel@btopenworld.com
or 020 7121 8938.

**Edwardian Gardens:
The Autumn of Extravagance**
Ashridge Garden History Summer
School with the National Trust
Friday 31 July to Wednesday 5 August

Contact Lisa Lloyd: 01442 841 179 or
email: lisa.lloyd@ashridge.org.uk

**Hartwell, a Palladian landscape:
Henry Keene & Richard Woods**
Saturday 15 August

£75, contact Rosemary Jury: 01296 715 491
or email: events@bucksgardenstrust.org.uk

**Gwent Arts and Crafts
GHS Study Weekend**
Saturday 5 & Sunday 6 September

£84.50, not including accommodation.
Contact Anne Richards as above

**Historic Orchards
GHSS Study Weekend**
Saturday 5 & Sunday 6 September

£55, contact Sue Hewer, as above.

**Gardens of the Isle of Wight
GHS Study Tour**
Saturday 19 & Sunday 20 September

£96, includes entrances to gardens, tours,
transport to and from the gardens and
Saturday supper. Contact Chloe Bennett,
Dove House, 5 The Street, Thornham
Magna, Eye, Suffolk, IP2 8HB, include
an SAE. Phone: 01379 672 901 or email:
chloe.bennett1@btinternet.com

**The Walled Kitchen Gardens
Network International Forum**
Hampton Court Palace
Friday 16 October

Speakers include Antoine Jacobsohn,
Versailles; Herman van den Bossche,
Belgium; Dr Kristin Püttmann, Germany; &
Todd Longstaffe-Gowan on plans for the the
Royal Kitchen Garden at Hampton Court.
www.walledgardens.net or email Fiona
Grant: f.grant14@tiscali.co.uk or phone:
Anne Richards: 01432 354 479

**Plant Power:
Herb, Physic and Botanic Gardens**
Friday 23 to Sunday 25 October

Oxford Weekend at Rewley House, GHS
and OUDCE.
Residential and non-residential places from
£95. Contact Short Courses Administrator,
OUDCE, 1 Wellington Square, Oxford
OX1 2JA. Phone: 01865 270380, email:
ppdayweek@conted.ox.ac.uk.

**Chiswick House Gardens
GHS Study Day
on the recent restoration**
early November

Details and venue will be in *NEWS* 84.
Contact Robert Peel, as above, to express
an interest.

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ghsmembership@lavenhamgroup.co.uk

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