

# INTRODUCTION

Cathedrals have a special place in national life. For Anglicans and Catholics they are important for the role they play as centres for a diocese, and thus as a focus for support and example within the Church. This, of course, is what makes a cathedral a cathedral: the term can be applied to any church, large or small, old or new, as long as it holds the seat, or *cathedra*, of a bishop.

But the word has a wider currency, one equally evocative among people whose faith does not include the concept of episcopacy – and, indeed, people of no faith at all. It conjures up a church of extraordinary scale and breathtaking splendour:

It is in both senses that cathedrals are exemplars of effective conservation. Their role as diocesan seats gives them a place in the wider community and a special visibility. People notice when, as has recently been done at Norwich, a cathedral places a strikingly contemporary visitors' restaurant within the ruins of its monastic refectory, or when Salisbury places a dramatic new font in the middle of its nave.

This is one of the reasons why the planning regime gives special attention to cathedrals. The process of Ecclesiastical Exemption acknowledges their special status as places of worship, but does not free them from the duty to do things carefully and well, as the outline in the Postscript makes clear. And yet change is certainly possible.

Indeed, change can be a necessity. Cathedrals play an especially vital role today because they are so popular. Wells, for example, greets 470,000 visitors each year; and holds religious or cultural events within its walls about five times a day. Yet until recently, the cathedral had no adequate toilet, education area or Song School, and an overcrowded restaurant. The new developments these entail have resulted in one of the biggest building programmes at a medieval cathedral since the Reformation. Wells is not alone: at Ely there was only limited provision of public toilets, and at Chester the Song School was split between two buildings, one of which did not have covered access to the church itself.

It is a measure of the power of cathedral architecture that these buildings appear so timeless, when in fact they are testimonies to a level of development that, looking back over a millennium or so, can seem almost restless. The great medieval churches could be re-ordered or extended every few decades, a process often lasting several centuries; fittings – especially since the Reformation – have come and gone, reflecting changing attitudes to liturgy.

Today, these churches continue to attract large congregations, and the Anglican cathedrals in particular act as venues for major public events. In some cathedrals, even greater numbers of people visit as tourists. They also need to remain prayerful spaces, offering sanctuary to those who value these buildings precisely because they provide the opportunity for quiet prayer; reflection and spiritual recuperation.

The response to this has taken a variety of forms: at Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral, visitor facilities have been provided around the building; at the nearby Anglican cathedral, by contrast, such facilities have been placed inside the church itself. Both projects aim to revivify the respective churches' connection with those who encounter them.

Elsewhere, especially in the Anglican cathedrals, the veneration of saints is being revived. This is partly a response to a realisation that those who come to cathedrals have many motivations. Even if they do not know what they are looking at, many visitors have their spiritual antennae more sharply attuned in cathedrals than they do elsewhere. Such people may sit in a blurred area between 'tourist' and 'pilgrim', and need to be respected as such. So there is a call for increased understanding, and for that understanding to be communicated in ways which are richer and deeper than can be done within a guided tour or a guidebook: this means new shrines and associated liturgies – as has been done at Hereford – and new ways of approaching old shrines, as at St Albans.

For many Christians, of course, these saints never went away. A casual visitor may be struck by the display of devotion in Catholic cathedrals. Prayers are offered, and candles lit, in front of statues and images. Large, multi-ethnic congregations gather for a mid-week Mass. There is a palpable sense of continuity with the past.

The Catholic cathedrals have a distinctive story. As a result of the religious persecution that followed the Reformation in England, it was not until towards the end of the eighteenth century that Catholics were able to build churches for public worship and not until 1850 that the Catholic hierarchy was restored. While they lack the endowments of their Anglican counterparts, and are not nearly so ancient, they nevertheless comprise one of the country's most important and moving collections of Victorian and twentieth-century art and architecture.

Developments in such buildings will be relevant in many settings: not only the Victorian Catholic cathedrals, but also the medieval and later parish churches that have been turned into the cathedrals of the younger Anglican dioceses. The Catholic cathedral at Leeds, for example, has been through a thorough modernisation and updating of its internal arrangements, in which a series of undramatic, carefully considered interventions has made a real difference to the building.

Exceptionally, it has been possible to justify giving cathedrals permission to create new doors in medieval walls, or – as at Lichfield – to excavate an area at the heart of the church before a new nave altar could be installed. With advice from the cathedral archaeologist, permission was finally granted on the basis that, should significant remains be uncovered in context, the project would be abandoned.

Elsewhere, elegant solutions are being found to the legislative imperatives these churches face. Cathedrals are public buildings and must respond to applicable laws on disabled access, the safeguarding of vulnerable adults and children, health and safety, and fire prevention. The St Albans wheelchair lift is but one sensitive response: the fire doors at Winchester are another. Both are permanent solutions, signs of a commitment to the long term that is one of the cathedrals' greatest strengths.

In this very commitment lie some of the greatest challenges facing cathedrals and their fabric. The pressure for change has continually to be balanced with the need to maintain and conserve. The cathedrals' record on the latter in recent years is an impressive one, but it is an area in which they must never let down their guard. Perceived tensions can arise between looking after the old and creating the new, tensions exacerbated by the external funding streams available. Those who provide such funds may well be more interested in giving support to programmes that provide new artwork and better access than to projects which focus on maintenance and repair. This is also the reason why the permissions process – for all its constructive intent – inevitably takes time. Careful consideration is a necessity, as is the balancing of various interests.

Few of the journeys undertaken by those who promoted these schemes have been short or easy. Sometimes the process has been long and arduous. Conflict can arise between bodies with disparate priorities. It is not our aim to play down that risk. Rather this booklet aims to underline the creative potential of early pre-application discussions and of shared understanding, both of the significance of the buildings and of the needs of those who care for and use them.

These apparent tensions are by no means irreconcilable. In 2008 English Heritage published *Conservation Principles*, a document which outlines in detail the philosophy underlying our approach to the making of changes to historic structures and places. It is a statement that makes clear the benefit of understanding a site in its widest historical context, allowing a consistency of approach to underpin everything from bold new construction programmes to small-scale conservation projects. We recommend it to all who read this booklet.

Equally, wider changes to the protection and management of the historic environment were introduced by *Heritage Protection for the 21st Century*, a White Paper published in 2007 by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. These aim to open up processes within protection regimes, ecclesiastical and secular alike. The idea is to ensure that control, whilst not loosened where essential, is better targeted at those matters which need it, reducing paperwork and relaxing external supervision of minor or unimportant matters. Trust is the watchword; as this publication shows, much thought goes into works at cathedrals and it is important that energies are focused on things that matter – on research, design and execution – rather than being caught up in unnecessary bureaucracy.

Long-lasting solutions are rarely cheap, and resources are an issue for everyone. The projects in this booklet are impressive for their constructive engagement with grant-giving bodies and other potential sources of funds. We have tried to give an idea of relative costs, and of the ways in which specific circumstances – regeneration funds in Liverpool; local authorities in Ely; the Heritage Lottery Fund in York and many other places – have created opportunities for development. Every cathedral will have its own potential in this regard, and each benefits from (and is of benefit to) local organisations involved with development, regeneration, tourism and cultural life.

Cathedrals are connected to the wider world. This is, of course, an inherent part of their religious mission. But it applies in more prosaic ways, too. These buildings support traditional skills, for example. Important recent work by sculptors, silversmiths, creators of stained glass, carpenters and mosaicists are illustrated here. As our example from Lincoln illustrates, cathedrals are working to create effective career paths in traditional stonemasonry; a craft they play a vital role in sustaining. In this they help meet a need that is crucial for the future of historic buildings in general.

Meanwhile, other issues are making themselves felt. Cathedrals are rarely well insulated or energy-efficient. The moral and legal imperatives to improve in this matter will only increase. Many dioceses are responding to this by taking a pastoral lead: Chelmsford, for example, describes itself as an 'eco-cathedral' for its active role in working with parish communities on the issues posed by climate change. The chapter there has found that only limited changes to the heating and lighting systems of the cathedral church itself are – so far – economically justifiable. The relighting of the interior and exterior of Salisbury has been a major project, carried out with great sensitivity and care, and improving the quality of the lighting greatly, while reducing energy consumption by 40 to 60 per cent.

Sustainability is also about re-use, and here, any building that has stood for almost a thousand years might offer a lesson or two for the rest of us. At York, an innovative project by the York Glaziers' Trust has transformed the prospects of the Bedern Chapel, a medieval building in the close which, in living memory, lay almost in ruins. This project has resulted in a new facility, revealing to the public the fascinating process of stained glass conservation and bringing life back to an overlooked corner of the city.

These examples show what a wide range of solutions is possible. They vary enormously in scale and in the way they respond to the older structures around them: twenty-first century Gothic revival at Chester; minimalist/contemporary at Liverpool Metropolitan; a straightforwardly functional approach at the Bedern Chapel. Ultimately, all respond to the individuality of the building itself, and to the historic patterns on which that character depends.

The aim is not stylistic conservatism: it is to encourage cathedrals to reflect upon and reveal the underlying grain of their development. At Norwich, thanks to the new Refectory and Hostry, the medieval cloister is once again the primary circulation route for those visiting the church. At Wells, an entirely new sequence of spaces by which visitors are welcomed and moved through the building has been created through the opening up of blocked medieval doorways. These interventions are at once dramatic and inspired by a deep engagement with the history of these buildings. Something comparable can be said of most of the works in this booklet.

New works demand careful analysis, and also leaps of creativity. The process is exemplified by projects such as the South Churchyard at St Paul's, where disabled access has been improved, a new public space created and interpretation of the cathedral's history transformed, all on a single site, drawing much inspiration from the buried remains of Old St Paul's.

These, then, are thoughtful interventions, cognisant of the uniqueness, the historic value, the public worth and the spiritual imperatives contained within and around these remarkable buildings. As such they are reminders that there need be no conflict between conservation and the demands of liturgy, nor between the study of an ancient fabric and worship within it. Care for what we have inherited is a matter of responsive and responsible living, as is the reshaping of that inheritance for the future in ways that are sympathetic, effective and sustainable.

Change in cathedrals has caused discord in the past. This booklet shows a way forward for avoiding this in future, and makes it clear how worthwhile the journey can be. Detailed pre-application discussion helps, aiding all involved in their understanding of the process. Inspired design helps, too.

These are important concerns, questions of spiritual and environmental responsiveness; they matter to anyone who wishes to build a strong community. They require both creativity and care. They are, in short, part of the dedication to 'living well' that the Churches do so much to promote.

