

Blackburn Cathedral Music & More Online Supplement No. 16

Thursday 16th May 2013

One-Day Conference: The Cathedral Quarter

When Canon Ian Stockton planned a day's conference in Blackburn Cathedral to reveal the creative thinking which went into the planning of our new Cathedral Close, he engaged three brilliant lecturers:

James Sanderson, our cathedral architect, who is also architect of Chester Cathedral,



Professor Tim Gorringe, from the University of Exeter, and



Professor John Rodwell, who is a freelance international ecologist involved in research, teaching and consultancy. He's also an honorary Canon of Blackburn Cathedral.



The programme for that remarkable day attracted distinguished clergy and laity from many cathedrals, including Ripon, Bradford, Lichfield, Peterborough and Sheffield, and also representatives from our own diocese.

Members of our cathedral congregation would have been thrilled if they had been free to attend this highly constructive and richly informative day – for the prospects before us all are so exciting.



It seemed, to your editor throughout that extraordinary day, that we were being bombarded by a never-ending torrent of inspiring creativity of the very highest, widest and deepest levels.

Every speaker seemed to utter a continual stream of 'one-liners', all of which could provide material for fruitful discussion, such as:

The Holy Spirit only speaks dialect. (i.e. He addresses the local culture and local resources which all understand.)

The Shard and Gherkin skyscrapers in London are egocentric. (i.e. they shout 'Look at me' – and dominate rather than relate to human beings.)

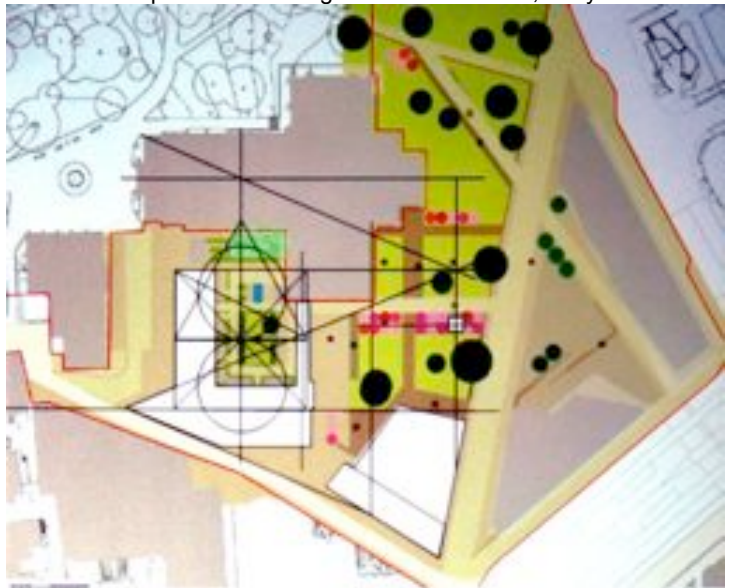
Imperfection is part of beauty. (Perfection is too challenging for humanity to deal with.)

James Sanderson illustrated his presentation with thrilling architectural drawings of the Deanery, Canons' houses, apartments and office buildings for our new Cathedral Close.

The new accommodation for clerical and lay staff will look very splendid.



But behind all this planning is mathematics – the mathematics which has inspired the building of cathedrals for 1,000 years.



The reason for the mathematics is to give buildings a symmetry which the visitor may not necessarily see but which gives a sense of order to the space which can be felt, albeit unconsciously.

An important aim for the new Close is to provide direct access to the cathedral from every side for, at present, access from the Boulevard and Dandy Walk is severely restricted by walls.

The bus station will be moved to Penny Street so that the Cathedral Close can offer space for relaxation and refreshment.



Professor Gorrings (at the centre of the table) began his talk by quoting from Psalm 24: ***The earth is the Lord's, and all that is in it.*** Therefore there should be no difference between a sacred building and a secular building, for all belong to God.



Our current Cathedral Close

God is in all buildings; it is easy to forget Him in the Mall, but easier to remember Him in Sacred buildings.

Because God took flesh, therefore matter matters!



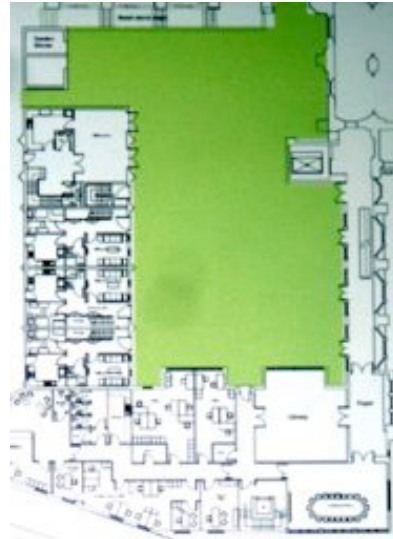
Plans for the new Close, showing an extension at the East end (in green) to where part of the bus station now is, and new buildings (in blue). 1 is the new hotel, 2 is the new cathedral building and 3 is the new office block.

Professor Gorrings's fascinating talk covered the sweep of history – encompassing the changing ideas about God through the centuries.

'There is something Incarnational about the best architecture,' he said, 'for as God was incarnate in Christ, therefore all people are equal.'

'When we look at a building what message does it give about us human beings? Gracious buildings and life-enhancing buildings give us a vision of what it means to be truly human.'

Professor Gorrings went on to quote D. H. Lawrence, who said, "People need beauty more than they need bread." Of course we need both, but beauty is not an add-on.



The new restful cathedral lawn (with car park hidden beneath!)

And so, referring to our new Cathedral Close, Professor Gorrings asked, 'What is it that makes a building work? Surely it is something without a name: Grace and respect for God's earth.'

'What kind of world are we bequeathing to future generations? What will people say about our new Cathedral Close? May it add grace to the cathedral and grace to Blackburn.'

Professor Rodwell continued the onslaught of major creative ideas to our stimulated minds and hearts.

He asked what were the theological implications of the new developments in our Cathedral Close.

He said that 'place is a space where things happen. Place is where God is at work – all spaces, not just churches. (May our new Cathedral Close be a place where God can be seen to be at work!)

'Land is a pure gift,' said Professor Rodwell. 'It is not a tradable commodity. And so how does the new Cathedral Quarter tell the story of what we have been, what we are and what we shall be?'

Professor Rodwell went on to challenge us by asking, 'Who shares this Cathedral Quarter with us? Is it solely ours, or are all people welcome? "Cloister" in German means a space where people can feel at home and secure.'

'And so we shall make ourselves at home through those whom we will welcome here. But what kind of welcome will we give to all who come to our new Cathedral Close?'



The Dean had welcomed us at the beginning of this remarkable day, and we were given a delicious luncheon in the Crypt, which gave us the opportunity to chat one-on-one with our distinguished guests.

It was a most rewarding day and we are deeply grateful to Canon Stockton for arranging it for us.