

Martin Gwilliams
Progress update November 2021

The end is nigh

And so it came to pass, the final trip to a Cathedral as part of the CWF Foundation Degree programme took me to Chester. Arriving on a dark afternoon at the beginning of November at Chester station, I did one of my usual tricks of looking at my destination, on this occasion the Cathedral, on a map on my mobile phone. Being a cheapskate, I pictured the map and my destination in my head so rather than use up valuable data with the useful lady telling me which way to turn next etc, I then headed for the Cathedral. I mean how difficult would it be to find it; Chester is a modest sized city? So then, unsurprisingly, and again not that unusual for me I found myself heading off in the wrong direction. Soon I found myself negotiating a large roundabout by way of navigating a couple of the city's underpasses and some local inhabitants of subterranean Chester. Fortunately, I soon came across two angels in the form of Wes and Matt, two of my fellow CWFers who were able to point me in the right direction of the Cathedral. As I headed further along the street which I had been walking, under the clock and then looked up the first turning on my right as instructed by my angels, there it was, Chester Cathedral, surround by shops and other buildings. Partly cloaked by night-time darkness. Softly lit and very unassuming but there.

Pitching the tent

All the Cathedrals I have visited as part of the programme have a lovely setting in their city. Some up high like beacons or lighthouses, but Chester reminded me of that great passage from scripture, which we may hear in particular at this time of the year ... God came and pitched his tent among us. It is sometimes translated as ... God *dwelt* among us However, my wife and I have great fondness for the former ... and *pitched his tent* among us The picture poetry that it evokes of God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - in the form of the cathedral in the thick of the action, among the people and everyday life of the city doing its work. Of course, cathedrals with their stones and mortar may suggest something a little different to tent being pitched, but that's for another time or assignment. The former translation and the whole prologue of St. John's gospel also reminds my wife and I of our dear, late, great friend, Sir Arthur Hockaday as he used to and read it so beautifully, diligently, and deliberately at the service of Nine Lessons and Carols back in our old parish.



Ten heads are better than one

Our main reason for being in Chester was the culmination of the CWF Historic Carving module for which me and my fellows have been carving the fawn heads which we started back in York in September.

On the Tuesday morning following a most splendid and delicious breakfast of eggs royale which was topped with a lovely herb that tasted a little like rose, I made my way with Tony, Anna and Alex to the Cathedral and to the Chapter House where we laid out our fawn heads on tables in the room. We each then took it in turns to have a private session to talk about our piece and how we had progressed with doing them with the two module leaders/assessors. After the conclusion of the assessing, all ten heads were then laid out next to each in a line on series of tables which gave us a

good chance to see and compare each other's work and approach to carving it. Most of them were rendered in stone, but a couple in wood. There was a variety of tool marks, some with claw marks left on and others beautifully smoothed. It was nice to see the way each of us had worked the same maquette with little nuances in each carving. We had each produced a set of three drawings as part of the module too. It was a nice module and Cathedral to end our visits.

Best of Chester



I really liked visiting Chester Cathedral; it is lovely. From the impression of it given by Tom, my fellow CWFer and stonemason at Chester, I was expecting the Cathedral to be quite small. However, it is deceptively long, possibly made to feel like this by the way the choir screen and then the shrine of St. Werburgh break up the flow of the central body of the church. There are lots of lovely spaces in the around the church. The vestibule of the Chapter House, the design and architecture of the organ loft and the cloister garden stood out for me. The cloister garden is the first one that I have seen from the ones that we have visited during the programme that feels like it has peaceful, restorative and healing qualities to it. It is a nice size with some well-thought-out planting. One feature in the Cathedral which caught my attention was a quirky piece of architectural development which sadly no FAC would allow today, but one which makes cathedrals and other such places all the better for them. A column runs down through the centre of a former and now half of a piscina – brilliant!

After a good old tower tour (you can see at least one of Liverpool's Cathedrals from the top), a visit to the works yard; a last supper together on our final evening, including a delicious lemon rice pudding and few good ales; the next morning after a walk round the city wall, it was cheerio and bon voyage Chester and my fellows.

In other news

This month I also completed my Conservation module, which I wrote about in October's blog. I cleaned and conserved a section of stones at the base of the north-west buttress of the tower and

which I also repointed. Last on the last Friday of November our module assessor came to the Cathedral to record me as I talked him through the process and treatments I used for this project. It has been a really enlightening module which has taught me a lot about the value and purpose of conservation and repair of stones and the many treatment options which are available.

On site my colleagues and I have done few more miles of repointing. We also cleaned and conserved various sections of the north and west faces of the north transept. The season for pointing and cleaning it is now over and so we have retreated to hibernate in the workshop. Here I have begun work on my final piece of stonework of the Cathedral, a section of a pinnacle for the north nave parapet. I have almost completed the masonry process, which started with one of my favourite operations, sawing stone using a hand saw – who knew you could! But I guess it makes complete sense.



God's Wonderful Rale-ways

My final assignment for CWF is due in towards the beginning of December. It will include a section on what I might do next after the course and apprenticeship has ended. Naturally I imagine with the skills and knowledge I have developed and gained I will head to London or elsewhere in the south-east to seek work with stonemasonry firms. However, one flight of fancy lead me to dream of my own TV show along the lines of one of my favourites. No, not Murder She Write, but Great British Railway Journeys with the brilliant Michael Portillo. However, mine would have the USP of blending four of my loves: Cathedrals, Railway Journeys, Railway Stations and Real Ale. To my knowledge there are lots of books and some shows about each of these subjects but has anyone yet tried to blend them all in one brilliant show. Surely they are suitable bedfellows? I would plan to visit all the Cathedral cities by train, admire the station (if possible), likewise the cathedral and then finally sample some of the local ales. Great British Rale-way Journeys! You heard it here first...

Cathedral : City



It did also make me think. I'm sure we can all think of our favourite British cathedral. However, which cathedral city has the best combination of station and cathedral? Bristol, Newcastle, Edinburgh... ? A city which has a station equal in its architectural merit (or on a par) to that of its cathedral? I say this as I was a little disappointed at the poor state Chester station. From the outside

a grand looking place but it has been a bit butchered and neglected on the inside. This got me thinking about the best combo, especially as some stations are compared to being cathedral-like. One for the dinner table at Christmas perhaps... ?

Happy Advent!