

Title: Chris Pullen Interview

Creators: Rick & Julia Goldsmith

Project: 'The Close in Living Memory: Hereford Cathedral
Close oral reminiscences''

Subject: Autobiography, Living and working around Cathedral
Close in Herefordshire, Heritage

Publisher: Catcher Media Social CIC

Tags: Cathedral Close, oral history, heritage, PV,
participatory film-making, community film, Herefordshire

Identifier: Chris-Pullen

Interview Date: 2010, Hereford

Interviewee: Chris Pullen (speaker, male)

Interviewer: Marsha O'Mahony & Julia Goldsmith (speaker,
female)

Camera & Sound: Richard Goldsmith (male)

Producer: Julia Goldsmith

Language: English

Type: Video

Width: 1440 pixels

Height: 1080 pixels

Scan type: Progressive

Stereo/Mono: Stereo Mixdown

Duration: 11 min 40 seconds

Original copyright: Catcher Media Social CIC CC BY-NC

Holder: Catcher Media Social CIC

Transcript:

(00:00)

Chris introduces himself - chancellor of the Cathedral, one of the ancient offices connected with the cathedral that goes back many hundreds of years.

Originally it was to do with the writing office for the Cathedral, all of it's charters and correspondence and some responsibility for the education of the young people connected with the Cathedral which in the fullness of time became Cathedral School.

It's broadly today the education side of things that Chris is in charge of and the Library, the archives, the Mappa Mundi and it's exhibition, the school visits and adult education along with the day to day life of the place and Chris' role in that.

(00:48)

The houses around the close go back many many hundreds of years and are the traditional houses in which the Canons of the Cathedral have always lived, so Chris thinks it's great to be part of the tradition not just in the job he does, but the house that he lives in.

(01:04)

Chris lives on the corner of Church Street and it's a very public spot - they get lots of people going by all the time; workers, pupils from Cathedral school in their hundreds, buskers, tramps, beggars, tourists and all of general life passes by.

(01:29)

A typical day there usually starts quite noisily, probably with Pizza Express he will hear the bottles being emptied out the back which can be any time from 5:30am onwards. Then he gets all the amee lorries going through the close cleaning it and sweeping all of the litter. Pretty soon you have people beginning to go to work, cycling and walking through, there's usually in the early morning broken glass here and there which gets cleaned up early on.

Then you get the bell for the Cathedral start to ring about 7:20am for morning prayer and then again at ten to 8 the bell is ringing once more. There is always people going to those services, and Chris can see them trickle into the Cathedral. Then the Cathedral school then turns up, and the whole place comes alive in a different way with people passing and repassing, whole classes, staff and other employees.

(02:42)

Around lunchtime the Close really begins to reach a peak, especially in the summer when they've got lots of people having picnic lunches and people spending their lunch hour out in the close, throwing frisbees and kicking balls around. In term time that goes on until about 6PM as there are lots of students from the colleges who come and chill out there before they catch the buses to go home. It's really like Brighton beach sometimes out there. Chris likes to see that it is used as a public space, but does wish they would take their litter with them. Sometimes when they get up and go the amount of litter is indescribable really, it's always a big debate there whether they should allow Amee to go on cleaning it up and taking it all away, or should they just let it get waist high and then people might begin to wake up to their own responsibilities a bit.

(03:40)

Chris says that they get lots of other kinds of people passing through, of course lots of tourists and visitors coming through all the time, people with children and little groups of children from the Library who've got a club and will sit out there and read stories and sing songs. Then they have all the gentlemen and ladies of the road, and the drug addicts and alcoholics, and the buskers which are a big feature of life in this house. That goes on and then it quietens down a bit and Chris goes to bed, then the city-centre drinkers and such come out smashing the bottles that will be there in the morning and singing and sometimes rapping on the door waking him up with screams and shouts. It goes quiet for a couple of hours between 2am and 4am... somedays!

(04:37)

Chris says that there are quite a few homeless people around and about, and this is known as a house that you can knock on the door and you won't be just turned away always. There is Elane for instance who comes, she is very upfront, bangs on the door and rings the bell - you answer the door and she says 'two cups of coffee please, one with three sugars' and 'have you got a light', 'have you got a fag' and so forth - but she's great and Chris has gotten to know her and talk to her.

Another one he sees, who sits just around the corner in the afternoons, called Rob. Chris usually gives him a cup of coffee and has a chat with him, people pass by and probably don't think too much to him but Chris has seen him go over and talk to youngsters leaving litter there and try and make them pick it up and put it in the bins. On a couple of occasions, he's come to the house and asked for a black sack then gone out on his own and picked up all the litter in the Close. People look at him and they don't realise there's a lot more to Rob than they'd understand. Chris said to him 'that's very public spirited of you' and Rob replied 'Well... it is, but also a lot of money falls out of people's pockets so I'm helping myself really'.

(06:02)

Some of the people who knock on the door are very fussy about what they will and won't

have. They'll say 'three sugars, but not white' and 'I want a biscuit please, but not a digestive', 'If you've got a chocolate bar I don't have galaxy' - things like that. Chris thinks that is a matter of pride really, because it's humiliating to have to beg for your food and drink but if you can in some way control what is coming back at you it gives you a little shred of pride still - and Christ respects that.

(06:40)

Chris talks about bringing up his family on the Close. Living on the corner of church street probably sounds pretty exposed and noisy, and it is, but it's a really interesting place as well. Chris has five children, just three of them live at home now, and he thinks for them it must be a fantastic thing - it's not like he grew up at all, or where they were in Worcester 150ft back from the road behind shrubs and trees. Here they are right in it, and whatever the nuisance value, there's a fantastic opportunity to really see things outside your house you've never seen before. (07:27) They've had army homecomings with a tank driving past, they had the prince of wales walking past, a BBC outside broadcast happening as well as big orchestra and choral events where you can see everyone go in, they've sadly had funerals of service men and other sorts of parades and marches, protests in the Close. So it really is interesting, and Chris thinks that it is an experience of life that they wouldn't have had otherwise - and seeing life in all of it's roughness. People have been arrested outside... When Chris told his friends that he was going to go and live in a Cathedral Close they thought that it would be a very quiet backwater sort of thing. Instead of that his family has come to live somewhere almost like Trafalgar Square and Chris thinks that is really good.

(08:27)

Chris says it is a strange thing having a busker outside of the house much of the time - it's rather a mixed blessing. People walk past them and think that's nice and throw a penny in, and then there's Chris wishing they wouldn't throw any money in at all so they'd go somewhere else. He doesn't let it get under his skin, one or two of them do though - such as the guy who plays the recorder that just penetrates into the house, wherever you go you can hear every note that he is playing and he's not actually playing terribly good notes! It goes on for hours and it can really wear you down. What Chris has taken to doing is that when a busker arrives, he jots down the time, so that after two or three hours he can go out and say 'you've had three hours, can you go somewhere else now' and usually they're pretty reasonable about it. (09:23) There was one busker that got into a great debate with Chris - there were loads of people sitting on the Close and he wanted to not take any notice of Chris saying 'you've had your time can you go somewhere else' and he started getting the people in the Close into a debate saying 'Ladies and gentlemen this man said he wants me to go away - you like my music though don't you?' and it was fantastic as they all shouted out 'NO!'.

(09:45)

Chris talks about how it is quite challenging living there at the moment with the Close being done up as there is noise all the time, Monday to Friday, big diesel engines going and diesel

fumes. All day long and the beeping of lorries reversing, the dust, mud being tracked through - so it's quite something keeping on top of all that. It's interesting to seeing it all going on and it is another of the great experiences of being there seeing the Close all being done up. Chris really looks forward to seeing how it's going to be when it's finished as it will be transformed and all the dust and the mud will have been well worth it. One of the things that they are going to get is some railings across the front of the house - at the moment when you get up you find the beer cans on the windowsills or people hammering on the door at night, but they're going to have railings like No.10 Downing Street and the herd will be held back from the windows. When they've had a particularly bad night and wake up they say 'roll on the railings!'. Chris does think that the atmosphere will change a bit with the curbs put in, the gateways and the whole place being given a lift. Chris is sure that it will make people appreciate it and enjoy it but in perhaps in a nicer, better way that has been the case in recent years.

(11:16)

Chris says it is always very busy on the close, they get folks just passing through going shopping or going to work coming backwards and forwards. All of the pupils from Cathedral school and the ordinary life of the place. They also get the big events, the soldiers coming by, the homecomings and the prince of wales, Monty Don and Dimbleby. It's great watching the work going on there and has been fascinating watching the stonemason's yard being put together - which arrived almost like a big flat pack, a timber building that is all assembled ready to go straight up. It's going to be such an improvement on the old one, and Chris is pleased to be here seeing it happening.

This film was made by Catcher Media for the Hereford Cathedral Close project in association with In Our Age and supported by The National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Watch the video interviews on the vimeo showcase:
<https://vimeo.com/showcase/7908663>