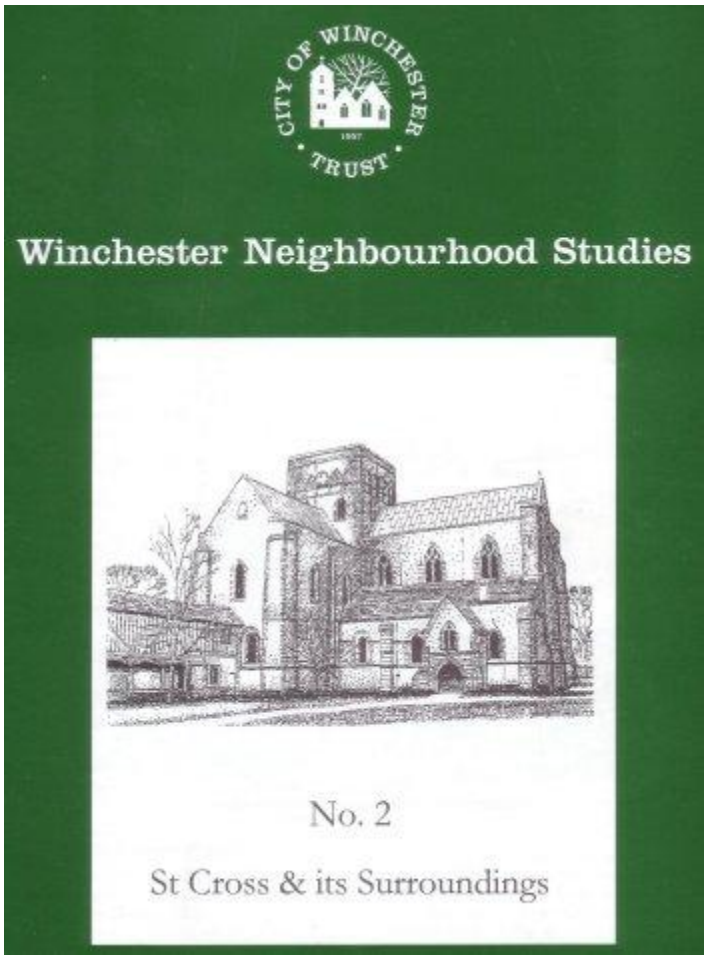
Neighbourhood Series - No. 2 - St Cross & its Surroundings

INDEX



This neighbourhood study is one of a short series, focusing on individual areas of Winchester. It is not intended to be a definitive guide to the area, but it is hoped that it will provide some useful background information concerning the history and character of the various parts of the city that make up the whole. The word "area" will be used to mean "neighbourhood" throughout the rest of the study. The picture is always changing, so we may produce updated versions in due course. Readers who have suggestions for amendments or additions are therefore welcome to write to the Trust so that their comments can be filed for future reference.



November 2003
Prepared by Nick Bourne, DipArch
For the City of Winchester Trust

With many thanks for the invaluable help given by Andrew Rutter

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Neighbourhood Studies - No. 2 - St Cross & its Surroundings

1 Defined Limits of Study



St Cross Church from the north

West, starting at the south end: the railway, Badger Farm Road, Whiteshute Lane, the west side of the railway to Stanmore Lane and along the back of the houses fronting St Cross Road (known as "Front Street" in the village, although the numbering uses "St Cross Road" throughout and for this reason "Front Street" will not be referred to again) to Ranelagh Road. North: along the backs of the houses in Norman Road, then along Kingsgate and Garnier Roads to Junction 10 on the M3. East: the motorway to the Compton slip road.

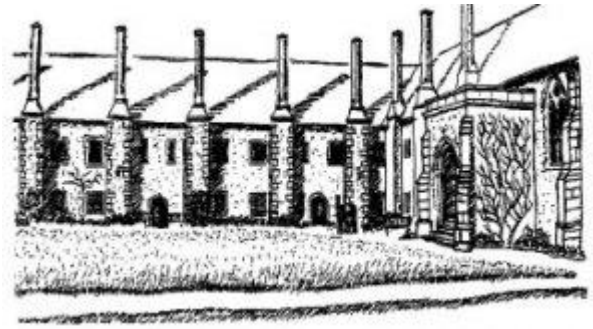
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2 Land Use

a Residential

The built-up area is low-lying, with a pleasant one-mile level walk into central Winchester that makes it attractive to the elderly. The main group of smaller terraced houses are in St Faith's Road, Clausentum Road and Cripstead Lane. A picturesque district of mixed housing fronts both sides of St Cross Road, Cripstead Lane and Back Street; much of this is at the back of the pavement. It is this housing that retains the "village" feel in spite of the traffic.

b Sheltered Housing



Hospital of St Cross & Almshouse of Noble Poverty

The Hospital of St Cross and Almshouse of Noble Poverty has provided sheltered accommodation since about 1130, but with a markedly different character to other

institutions. The Hospital is a major medieval national monument of distinction and its attraction to tourists is to some extent in conflict with the privacy of the brothers. Other nearby residential institutions and sheltered housing include St Cross Mede and The Grange; these are both conversions of large houses with substantial extensions. The main front of St Cross Mede has a bow fitted with curved sash windows with curved glass; this unusual feature closes the view along the lane called "The Gravels" when leaving the Hospital. This house is undistinguished but pleasant and it is fortunate that the development of this large site was restricted to the Mead Road frontage because this left some wooded land at a key point facing the entrance to the Hospital.

c Apartment Housing

The large size of a number of houses has led to some flat conversions, a process that is preferable to demolition, especially where a large garden and the front of the house can be kept as existing. A large 3-storey block of thirty flats of banal design has been built in Norman Road; these back onto a commercial garage and there is unfortunately no room for a tree screen between the two. Fifty-four dreary-looking flats have been built near The Grange; these have the merit of being screened from the road by trees. There are twelve flats on the corner of Stanmore Lane and a further ten in Cripstead Lane.

d Shop

The shop at St Cross has recently re-opened. In the past complaints were made about advertising on and around the building, but this is something that must surely be accepted for a shop in this position.

e Other Land Uses

On St Cross Road there is The Bell public house; there is a primary school, St Faith's, in St Faith's Road, and St Faith's church hall in Back Street. These and St Cross Church form the social nucleus of the village. In Gamier Road there is the sewage pumping station; built in 1875, this is an industrial building of some distinction but unfortunately it has lost its chimney; it has now been converted for office use, and one of the pump wheels now makes a distinctive external exhibit. A refuse reclamation depot is at the back; the City Council aim to move it to a more spacious site, which would reduce the present traffic congestion on Gamier Road. There is a builders' yard between the main road and the Hospital, and a petrol station and car dealer further north on St Cross Road. The latter has been smartened up, but the site has potential for residential development. The small commercial garage in Cripstead Lane is very much in scale with the neighbourhood and is to be encouraged.

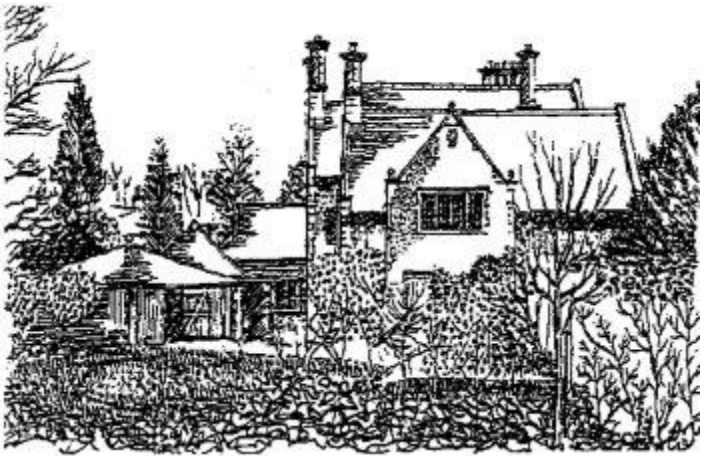
f Change of Use

On the corner of Cripstead Lane and St Cross Road the White Horse public house has been sympathetically converted to residential use, with a new hanging sign showing a white horse as a background to domestic activities. Opposite the one-time pub the then wine shop is now a house with a new house built on its previous

parking area; this might have looked better if a simpler design had been chosen.

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3 Routes, Traffic & Car Parking



The Master's House, St Cross

St Cross Road is the main route from the south for local traffic coming to Winchester. At present this traffic disturbs what could be a picturesque village. Further development of the Park-&-Ride to the south of the City to provide enough space for shoppers and visitors as well as commuters may help, but it is unlikely that this traffic will ever be sufficiently reduced to create a quiet village centre.

At present parking is in short supply to the east of St Cross Road; on the western side there is limited short stay space in Mead Road for tourists visiting the Hospital.

The footpath from the city to Farley Mount and Salisbury, the Clarendon Way, passes along the water meadows to the Hospital then up Mead Road to the railway and thence into White shute Lane, an ancient trackway cut deep into the ground by years of heavy use.

There is a marked cycle route from Twyford to the city centre. This passes under the M3, along Five Bridges Road (a bridle way) and along St Cross Road to Kingsgate Road, but on the St Cross Road section the cyclists are tangled with the traffic on a busy road as they always have been. Plans for a long distance cycle route through Winchester are being discussed; this might pass along a widened footpath from The College's New Hall past the pumping station and to the east of the Hospital to Five Bridges Road, and this could disturb the quiet walk from the City to St Cross. An alternative route would be from Domum Road along the widened footpath between the embankment and Palmer Field to the Tun Bridge and thence alongside the canal to Five Bridges Road.

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4 Important Viewpoints & Spaces



The west of St Cross Road, looking north,
with Bindon House Lodge in the foreground

The land between Clausentum Road and the river to the canal is wetland; behind Back Street there are allotments, and the remaining land to the north, east and south of the Hospital is pasture and two cricket grounds with pavilions. The footpath from the city through this land to Shawford and Twyford provides some recreational facility for people within and outside the district, although to the south of the Hospital the footpath is often very muddy.

St Faith's graveyard is a small open space, perhaps not fully appreciated. It has a number of conifer trees and is used as an unofficial children's play area; falling tombstones could be a danger. The church on this site was lost early in the 16th century, since when the parishioners have worshipped at St Cross.

Places from which there are good views of the Hospital and Church

a St Catherine's Hill: St Cross Church is an exceptional architectural jewel, and its close-knit sculptural qualities, with cathedral-like proportions, make it stand out clearly from the other Hospital buildings. This aspect of the Church can best be appreciated from St Catherine's Hill from which one gets a changing view when walking along the top.

b St Giles Hill.

c Royal Hampshire County Hospital (certain rear wards).

d The pastures to the south and east.

e St Cross Road to the west.

f Cripstead Lane looking down Back Street.

g On the path from the city, just south of Cripstead Lane.

h From the Tun Bridge car park.

i From the north field adjoining Bushfield Camp.

j From the butterfly reserve as far away as Magdalen Hill Down the Church still shows up sharply.



Back Street, looking north towards Cripstead Lane

Other important views in the area

k From the south end of Back Street towards Cripstead Lane.

l From the top of Mead Road to St Catherine's Hill with the Master's Lodge in the foreground.

It should be noted that any development on the St Cross Road frontage in front of the Master's Lodge might harm this view.

m Looking north along St Cross Road from The Grange Lodge towards the "village".

n Looking south along St Cross Road from Stanmore Lane towards the "village".

o From near St Faith's School southwards to a picturesque medieval timber frame house with gable, jetty and chimney projecting towards the street. This provides a link between Edwardian and medieval St Cross.

p View from St Cross Road down Barnes Close to the centrally-placed 120 Christchurch Road with decorative white-painted wood porch and other attractive features.

q The open character of the allotments gives a wide open view from Back Street to the water meadows and St Catherine's Hill. The allotments have potential for residential development.

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5 Trees



Horse Chestnut in the cricket field, St Cross Road

The district is generally well endowed with mature trees, of which there are some notable individual trees and groups:

a On the south wall of Goodworth House is a very fine Wisteria, and the tall cedar in the garden stands out well seen from the field at the far end of Cripstead Lane.

b Two very fine old horse chestnut trees in the cricket ground in St Cross Road.

c A tall Wellingtonia in St Faith's Graveyard, and also smaller yews.

d Horse chestnuts along Kingsgate Road at Priors Barton.

e Yew and conifers at St Lawrence House, 94 St Cross Road, and mixed trees at Avian Court.

f At Mithril, 51 St Cross Road, beech and larch along the boundary with St Cross Road.

g 106-116 St Cross Road: pines and blue conifers behind the houses in Edward Road.

h Bindon House, 118 St Cross Road: pines, chestnuts and conifers along Mead Road.

i St Cross Mede: beech and others.

j The Grange: mixed woodland with some evergreens.

k Front garden of the Master's house: evergreens including yew and laurel.

l Back gardens of 55-81 St Cross Road: one or two tall conifers that add interest to the skyline behind these houses.

m Group of deciduous trees adjoining St Cross Hospital car park.

n Trees in wetland between the pumping station and Cripstead Lane: willow, poplar, ash etc.

o Beech clump on the top of St Catherine's Hill.

p Double row of trees between Bushfield Camp and the north field. These help to screen the campsite from St Catherine's Hill and with the trees along the Clarendon Way form a backcloth to the north field.

q A tree screen from the Hockley Viaduct following the GWR track bed to Barfield Park-&- Ride. This reduces motorway noise at the southern end and screens the Bar End industrial estate from Palmer Field and the water meadows towards the northern end.

r Many trees in St Cross Park, including a double row of limes.

North of Barnes Close and the graveyard the number of trees decreases as the density of building increases, although they are by no means absent. Rising ground to the south of Stanmore Lane tends to enhance the value of trees as a back-cloth to the buildings on the west side of St Cross Road. Although the houses in Edward Road and Whiteshute Lane outside the conservation area are of little architectural merit the loss of the blue cedars in these roads would have an adverse effect on the existing conservation area.

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6 General Description of the District & Quality of its Buildings

This has been divided into zones for the convenience of description.

a The Hospital of St Cross
This nationally unique benevolent institution is still inhabited as originally intended and is in a class of its own. For those wishing to know more about this building of considerable architectural and historical interest, there are guides available at the porter's lodge and the book Saint Cross by P Hopewell (Phillimore & Co Ltd). The most attractive views and spatial experiences are to be found in its courts and interiors. Apart from the church tower the building is hardly visible from the village. The long west range as seen from the St Cross Road comes as a surprise; the chimney stacks on the courtyard front were so placed to give maximum impact at a time, circa 1443, when few had chimneys, besides suiting internal planning arrangements.On the south wall of Goodworth House is a very fine Wisteria, and the tall cedar in the garden stands out well seen from the field at the far end of Cripstead Lane.

b St Faith's Road & Clausentum Road
These terraced houses date mostly from circa 1900 and are of the type known as "Bye-Law"; for many years they have been maintained much as they were built. Recent trends have resulted in numerous changes to front doors, windows and other details, leading to the spoliation of the general appearance of the terraces. It is

recommended that Article 4(2) Directions be applied to these houses, as they will remain in use for many years yet. Also in St Faith's Road is St Faith's School, a picturesque building in flint with brick dressings with a recent successful extension, interestingly using prefabricated flint blocks.

c Back Street & Cripstead Lane



Back Street, looking north from the southern end

On the corner at 1 Back Street is The Old Farmhouse, a mediaeval hall house. On the west side of the roof is a small hip above the ridge, the probable location of the smoke vent for the central hearth; a fine brick and stone chimney has been added to this side. The north facade has much, probably original, timbering modified by later window insertion, carved barge boards and a jetty; a first floor has been inserted into the "hall", giving low ceilings. This building, and 3-10 Back Street are Listed Buildings. 10 Back Street has a large and pretty garden open to view from the road, and of a size that makes it vulnerable to future development; provided it is set well back and is of simple unobtrusive design, a new house should not harm the street scene.

Back Street, with part of Cripstead Lane, forms a very picturesque group despite the intrusion of five modern bungalows. 19-24 Back Street are a row of slate-roofed cottages with flint walls and brick dressings, and have unspoilt white painted windows and doors. 15-22 Cripstead Lane have tiled roofs and a variety of materials for their walls; the backs of these cottages contribute to the Back Street grouping and should be listed for group value. This row also provides good examples of how to install modern-design roof-lights for loft conversions, by siting them well away from other roof features such as hips and chimneys, and, although of varying size, the roof-lights are roughly aligned on their centre lines. The uneven surface of the roof disguises the slightly off-centred nature of the roof lights.

d St Cross Road, the "Village"

On the east side the odd numbers 53-63 and 75-79, and the Bell Inn are Listed Buildings; Nos 55-73 form a group of which 65-73 and 81 are not listed, though they still contribute to the character of the village group. No 71 is a weird house which, if it were altered might destroy its idiosyncrasy; incidental but important features such as

chimney stacks, dormer windows and porches could easily be lost with only conservation area protection and greater protection for it is needed.
On the west side of the road the complementary group of houses is much shorter: Nos 106, 108, 110, 116, 118 (Bindon House and its picturesque yellow brick and flint Lodge the latter having no number of its own). The Listed Nos 118 and 116 are followed by two undistinguished houses that are set well back from the pavement and then by the Listed Nos 110, 108 and 106. These latter houses stand at the back of the pavement, which helps to give the close-knit village effect that is so important to this district.

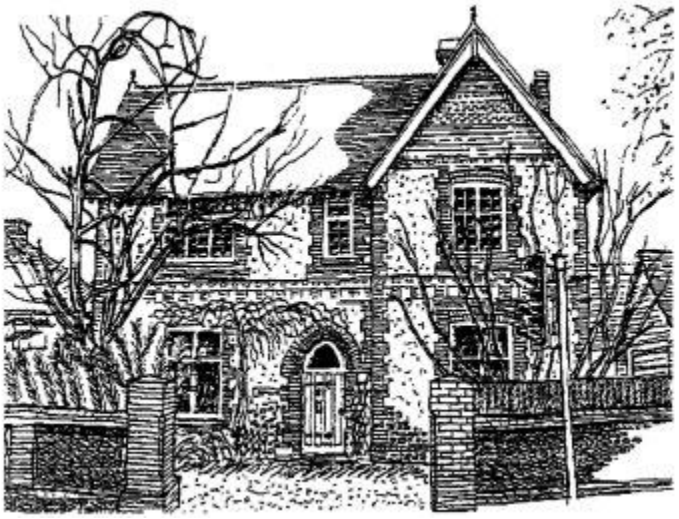
e The south end of St Cross Road



132,134 & 136 St Cross Rd., with the Lodge to The Grange at the left

On the west side stand the Listed Nos 132, 134 and 136, all at the back of the pavement, and forming a group with the lodge to The Grange. Although only three houses, there are five distinct frontages in different styles; together they make a pleasing group. On the east side stand two short terraces each of three cottages; all are in the ownership of the Hospital and are well conserved. Nos 91-95 are both older and simpler, with characteristic small windows, there is a recent extension at the south end carefully designed in the same style; Nos 85-89 date from about 1900.

f St Cross Road between Stanmore Lane & Ranelagh Road


Mithril, 51 St Cross Road

The west side consists of large detached and semi-detached houses, mostly undistinguished, although No 42, Rosenheim, has some interesting features and much fine brass and stained glass work inside. At present detrimental alterations are not evident, though No 90 has an unfortunate and ill-proportioned flats extension; and further alterations and replacements to these houses are now proceeding. There are three pairs of semi-detached four story houses, each with a wide full height brick bow with straight sash windows; which form an impressive group.
On the east side of the road are No 53, Goodworth House, a distinguished late 18th or early 19th century house with a three-centred rubbed-brick arched doorway with reverse honeysuckle fanlight, and No 51, Mithril, an unusually attractive Victorian house in flint with brick dressings and an original door with casement windows in original openings, all to a well-balanced asymmetrical design.

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7 Tourism

The Hospital and Church of St Cross is one of the main attractions of the City; the Hospital offers guided or personal tours and has a café. It is possible to follow the walk that John Keats made in 1819 when he wrote an ode To Autumn. This takes the visitor from The Close, past Winchester College through Ridding Meads to reach the Hospital entrance from the fields, which would be the preferred approach for many people; the bus service is an alternative.

Another tourist attraction would be a brief look at the village, but this will not have much appeal except in the unlikely event of traffic being reduced.

The Clarendon Way, from Winchester to Farley Mount and Salisbury, follows Keats' walk from the city to St Cross Hospital and then turns west to Salisbury.

St Catherine's Hill and Bushfield Camp are fully discussed in the next section.

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8 Conservation Area

The Winchester conservation area was designated in 1967, and since then the motorway has been completed. This has opened the door to pressure for commercial development on greenfield sites near motorway junctions, such as Bar End and Compton. Another change has been railway electrification, which has brought Winchester from the edge to well within the London commuter belt. These improvements in access to London have increased the pressure for residential development in the district. The motorway and its junctions are built to a scale much larger than Winchester's street infrastructure and its radiating Roman roads, or the railway.

A case can be made for extending the conservation area to include undeveloped spaces to the west of the motorway. The land between the River Itchen and the canal is a valuable open space but, being former water meadow, is wetland and largely inaccessible to the public; there are however pleasant views across it, and it is a tranquil place to be near. When walking along Five Bridges Road the drop in noise level from the motorway after passing through a break in the railway embankment is very noticeable. If the viaduct were removed, given a south wind, the noise impact on St Cross Village might be considerable. This issue makes a very strong case for an extension of the conservation area to control conditions in the one already existing. The viaduct is an example of an early reinforced-concrete structure encased in brickwork. The early (1710) Itchen Navigation still exists to the first lock, below which the bed has recently been drained leaving it dry. The straight section by Palmer Field is impressive when viewed from St Catherine's Hill.

St Catherine's Hill

This is a recreational area of long standing, and the top of the hill is a very worthwhile objective for both the tourist and resident walker, giving a sense of fulfilment when it is reached. Its historical interest lies in the iron-age fort, the visible remains of which are the rings of ditch fortifications and the old turf maze. The site of the mediaeval St Catherine's Chapel is no longer visible. On the south side of the hill is Plague Pits Valley, where victims of the 1666 plague were buried.

As one walks round the top of the hill there is a succession of fine views, the Hospital of St Cross and the Cathedral being in the first rank. These views are of breath-taking quality, giving the opportunity to appreciate these buildings in some detail from an unusual angle. It is a particularly good place to appreciate the jewel of St Cross Church from a viewpoint that changes as one walks along. There is also a panoramic view of the city that includes the tree-covered slopes of Sleepers Hill and West Hill, the Royal Hampshire County Hospital, the prison watch tower, the intrusive Police Headquarters and the spire of St Thomas's Church. From this vantage point it can be appreciated that the Cathedral is still the most dominant building in the city; and on a clear day the Isle of Wight may be seen to the south.



St Catherine's Hill from the North Field, Bushfield Camp

St Catherine's Hill is in the East Hampshire Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). It has now been severed from the rest of the AONB by the M3. The closure, removal and landscaping of the by-pass site has achieved a reunification of the hill with Winchester, and it would now seem logical that the hill should be included in the Winchester conservation area, for it is a part of Winchester's history and is a landmark to be seen from many places in and around the city. It belongs to Winchester College and is leased to the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, who wish to maintain it as chalk downland to encourage a flora and fauna typical of this habitat. This policy requires that the scrub (thorns, brambles, hazel etc) should be removed to prevent the enrichment of the soil, with a further requirement to keep the grass short by grazing Sheep and cattle are grazed here, so the Warden has to pursue a policy of educating the public into keeping their dogs under control.

The Beech clump gives the hill its special significance as a landmark and it is regrettable that the trees appear to be in poor condition. Until recently the maze has been maintained by a volunteer group who knew how to repair the raised turf strips maintained the maze turf. Sadly, since then these are breaking up as a result of people walking straight across the maze. The dugout paths are now overgrown with grass in parts.

Bushfield Camp

To the west of the Hospital and the railway lies a triangular piece of land consisting of the former army camp at Bushfield and its three attendant fields to the west, south, and north, of which the last two fields and the camp should be included in the conservation area. This control is necessary to preserve the incomparable setting of St Cross as seen from St Catherine's Hill, although this may not be sufficient because of the long-term pressure from the Church Commissioners, owners of much of the land, for a large residential development on the site. The main objection to building on the north and south fields is that it would disturb the green and gold backcloth to the view of the Hospital from St Catherine's Hill by replacing it with distracting buildings which would seriously damage a scene that has changed little since Norman times. The very satisfying composition of the Church is particularly vulnerable to competition from any new buildings to its west. The long abandoned army camp site, which has given its name to the area, is being considered by the City Council for development as a sports and hotel complex. Although this would be partially shielded by trees and the lie of the land, there are grave worries about the impact the roofs and floodlighting would have on the local environment. Whether

coupled with these proposals or as an independent development, the prospect of a major Park-and-Ride on this site raises similar concerns.

The north field could be utilised as an informal recreational and possible grazing area, with the benefit of certain views of the Hospital, the College chapel tower, the Cathedral and the beautiful range of hills to the east. These buildings are enhanced by the whitish grey colour of their finish and by their neighbours being hidden by the trees. With the sun in the west and maybe dark clouds to the north, the buildings have a remarkably luminous quality, a dramatic effect that can be marvellous under almost any weather conditions. Scrub clearance in the foreground will be important to ensure the future of this view; because of the low angle of view resulting from existing trees in the College grounds where their growth could become a hindrance.

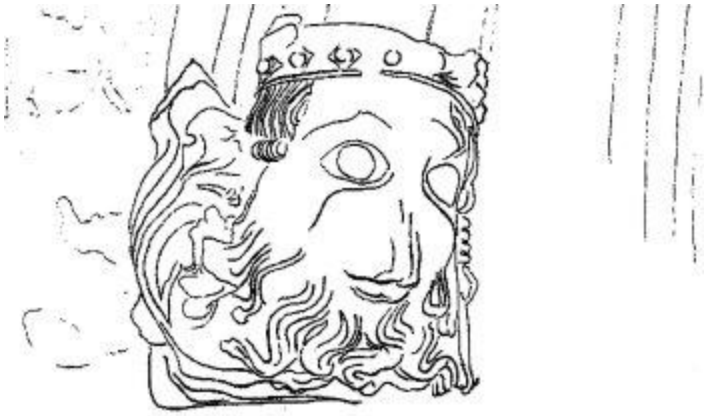
As a viewing point the north field is second only to St Catherine's Hill and, if preserved, might compensate to some extent for the steady erosion of amenity land in North Walls Park at the other side of the city; it is certainly more picturesque than North Walls because it is free of buildings, cars and other paraphernalia. If any development or amenity improvement is envisaged at Bushfield, it is critical that its existing characteristics should be preserved as much as possible. The conservation of the field may need some improvement, but it is essential that its sense of naturalness should be retained.

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9 Conclusion

The Hospital of St Cross and Almshouse of Noble Poverty is a unique monument of national importance, set in surroundings that are largely unchanged since its inauguration. The buildings are safe enough, but its attractive setting is under threat from possible development to the south-west. It is essential that tight control is kept over land such as the north field of Bushfield Camp to protect the nationally important St Cross Church from the distracting competition that structures built there would have on its setting when seen from St Catherine's Hill.

Some trees near the conservation area need to be better protected. The conservation area itself needs further protection by extending it east and south to the motorway, and south-west to include Bushfield Camp. The district has so far survived without serious damage from modem development, and new development should be discouraged or very carefully controlled. Some buildings standing near Listed Buildings need to "listed for group value" to protect the street scene, and if possible traffic in the St Cross Road should be reduced.



King's Head as column capital to arched entrance to the Brethen's Hall, Hospital of St Cross