Salisbury 2020 is a city on the move

As we look ahead to the new year, Salisbury has much to celebrate. Dave Roberts reveals plans for the 800th anniversary of Salisbury Cathedral’s foundation.

SALISBURY 2020 – City on the move is the celebration of 800 years since the laying of the cathedral’s first foundation stones in 1220. The initiative has been a long time in the making. Not quite as long as it took to build the cathedral or establish the city, but it was an idea that took root at least three years ago, over an eighth-of-a-week glass of wine.

Salisbury is unique among English cathedrals, as far as I know, in having deliberately moved from one location to another. This movement, from the hilltop of Old Sarum to the plain where it stands today, was the catalyst for the city to develop. And so a celebratory year themed around movement seemed obvious. What better way to engage community groups and partners from all walks of life and areas across the city than to celebrate movement?

In this story, movement takes many forms: the huge physical effort required to build a new cathedral, the development in technology and engineering skills required to create this extraordinary structure, and the forward-looking vision and faith that was needed to undertake such a venture – movement of body, mind and spirit. As a resource and heritage tool, Salisbury has a proud history and bright future in all these areas.

Early in 2018, I brought the added impetus of the nerve agent attack in the city that led to devastating injuries and the tragic death of Dawn Sturgess. The impact of the attack also saw visitor numbers dropping and morale in the city challenged. As part of the process of recovery, the cathedral’s 800th anniversary in 2020 represented a golden opportunity to bring the whole community together, to face up to what had happened in the city and to begin to move on with a positive future to celebrate.

The story behind the anniversary also says something about Salisbury both now and then. From the original ‘doves’ of hope that defiantly fluttered down the high street in May 2018, all the way back to the early 1220s when Bishop Pooke, the medieval bishop of Salisbury, was granted permission by the pope to move the cathedral in search of fresh water, and to escape bad weather, royal supervision and regular harassment by soldiers stationed at Old Sarum Castle, this is a story of resilience and endurance.

I like to think, as a long-time resident, that Salisbury has always played its part in history. In 1220, Pooke’s actions changed the community and landscape of southern Wiltshire forever, creating a national landmark that is known the world over. During the English Civil War, Salisbury swayed between Royalists and Parliamentarians, and during the reign of Cossoway the city was the site of a royalist rebellion. Later, Old Sarum became an infamous rotten borough and during the Second World War the city played an essential part in building the famous Spitfires that defended the country.

Whether moving the cathedral or building Spitfires, Salisbury has quite a legacy to celebrate and something we hope the range of activities will reflect – from Sarum Lights, the light spectacle at the cathedral in February to the Wessex Archaeology trail across the city and the International Arts Festival.

The founding partners of Salisbury 2020 are Salisbury Cathedral with Salisbury Business Improvement District, Salisbury City Council, Visit Wiltshire, Wiltshire Council, Wiltshire Creative and Wiltshire and Swindon Sports Partnership (WASP), the organisation I represent.

As part of the initiative, WASP is planning to provide b-quoties to develop 20 new sports coaches to work across the city. There will be a sports market with a series of sports clubs hosting taster events featuring sports as diverse as croquet, paddle boarding and triathlon, and clubs and groups are invited to apply to WASP.

Above: the west side of Salisbury Cathedral inset: Salisbury 2020 Logo

for businesses to host events that showcase what’s currently on offer to residents. In addition, there will be walks and cycle rides to help people explore the city, discovering what has made Salisbury special in the past, but also what makes it special to people today.

Elsewhere, the 2020 Salisbury International Arts Festival will celebrate the beauty, courage and joy of human movement, with specially programmed events for the year. Salisbury City Council is planning to deliver exciting and innovative events and activities, including a STEM/Science fair in March 2020 that will encourage younger residents to consider careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

For those with an interest in craft there will be an exhibition that explores the trades and traditional crafts of Salisbury through the ages, from medieval times up to the modern industries and crafts of today. For art lovers, the cathedral is mounting its largest contemporary art exhibition to date featuring work by major artists from the 20th and 21st century, including Sir Antony Gormley, Sheila Hicks, Henry Moore, Grayson Perry, Conrad Shawcross, and Turner prize winner Mark Wallinger.

The cathedral is also planning an Oragan Festival for 2020, including performances of the family favourite Peter and the Wolf in mid-June, and all its programming will focus on the development of music over the past 800 years. Together with BBC Wiltshire, it will also be encouraging debate with the thought-provoking Salisbury Conversations, exploring women in society, climate change and advances in technology, such as artificial intelligence.

Located on ancient routes between London, Exeter, Wiltshire and Southamton, Salisbury has always benefited from the movement of people, goods and ideas and this continues today. The city grew up in a history worth celebrating and a future worth investing in. I look forward to seeing the full programme for Salisbury 2020 – City on the move when it is released later in February, and seeing all the work done by the founding partners, their members and other stakeholders come to fruition, offering as many people as possible the chance to participate and play their part, in celebrating our city and our cathedral.

• Whether you are interested in becoming a sponsor, organising an event or becoming a 2020 champion, there’s an easy sign up. Just go to www.salisbury2020.org.uk
• Dave Roberts, who developed the Salisbury 2020, City on the move concept, is the non-executive director of Wiltshire and Swindon Sports Partnership

Right clockwise: composite image illustrating Sarum Lights; Dendalas, 1990 Bronze by Eduardo Paolozzi; Magna Flora Flower Festival; Salisbury 2020 founding partners and contributing partners at the launch; John Challenger at Organ Proms 2018; work progresses on the Father Willis Organ
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JAV: 08/08/2020

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Inset: Salisbury 2020 Logo

January 2020

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