

## MAGDALEN STREET, PLUS TWO YEARS

### Thirty schemes to be completed in 1961

#### Magdalen Street

Before May 1959 Magdalen Street, in Norwich, was virtually unknown, except to those who lived and shopped there. Since the experiment sponsored there by the Civic Trust its name has become familiar all over the country - and indeed is becoming known in many other countries.

The idea behind the Magdalen Street Project was to show how greatly the appearance of an ordinary, average street, typical of mile upon mile of shopping street throughout Britain, could be improved by the voluntary co-operation of all concerned. The details need not be set out again. Suffice it that the experiment made those who had known Magdalen Street for years feel that they had never really seen it before. Hundreds of representatives of Government Departments, Local Authorities and professional and trade organisations attended the opening and went away determined to apply the idea to their own towns.

#### Exploiting the Break-through

The Trust sought to drive this success home with lectures, films and pamphlets. One member of the Trust staff alone, Councillor Norman Tillett, Lord Mayor of Norwich at the time of completion of the scheme, has since spoken in hundreds of places in all parts of the United Kingdom and has just returned from an intensive tour of Northern Ireland. A 16 mm colour film of the Magdalen Street Scheme has received over 400 showings by local councils and Chambers of Trade. A broadsheet in colour was distributed to some 300,000 people concerned with the idea.

#### Burslem

A second pilot project was completed in Burslem, Stoke-on-Trent a year later. More ambitious than the first, this sought to give to a typically decaying area left over from the Industrial Revolution not merely a face lift but a new heart. An acre and a half at the centre was set out as a car park and pedestrian area; trees were planted, shelters, lavatories and a bandstand erected; once again the properties around were redecorated to an overall colour scheme and many items of street furniture were redesigned. Here, for all the industrial areas of the midlands and the north to see, was an example of how community effort can bring new life and pride to a dingy area that might otherwise have remained unchanged for decades to come.

### The Position Today

Over 400 cities, towns and villages in the United Kingdom now have improvement schemes under consideration; some half-dozen have completed schemes since May 1959; over 30 aim to complete schemes this year. It is noticeable that the idea tends to consolidate itself wherever it has taken hold. In Norwich, two other streets - The Walk and St. Benedicts - have completed schemes since Magdalen Street; another is scheduled for completion this year and one more in 1962. In Stoke-on-Trent another of the Six Towns aims to follow Burslem's example.

Many County Councils are pushing the idea with enthusiasm. The LCC, Dorset, Durham, Essex and Somerset are among those assisting schemes by financial contributions; others, for example Ayrshire, Hertfordshire, Huntingdonshire and Norfolk are helping by means of services, administration and co-ordination from the Planning Department. In Norfolk the County Planning Officer aims to complete a certain number of schemes each year until the whole County has been treated.

Schemes are normally initiated by the Local Authority, the Chamber of Trade, the local Civic Society or by a Joint Committee on which these bodies are represented. The Civic Trust does not aim to play a direct part in the execution of schemes but advises on procedure in the initial stages. For various reasons, nevertheless, a handful of schemes is being co-ordinated directly by the Trust. Of these Windsor is one; hard on the heels of the Windsor scheme comes another in Epping which is being inaugurated by the Lord Mayor of London on Saturday 27 May.

### Overseas interest

The Magdalen Street film was shown at the conference of American Institute of Planners at Philadelphia last autumn, since when more than a dozen enquiries have been received from official departments and independent corporations in the United States and Canada. Slides have been shown in the United States and Poland; other enquiries and requests for assistance have come from Gibraltar, Jaipur, New Zealand, Singapore, Sweden and South Africa.

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LEADER OF CIVIC TRUST  
VOLUNTEERS WORKING ON  
WALL

R.C. Harrison

### What was done

The whole of this area is dominated by the great bulk of the Castle, round the Western wall of which High Street and Thames Street wrap themselves. The object of the scheme was to enhance the character and dignity of this unique relationship.

The street picture, even in Windsor, was confused by a multiplicity of structures and objects and signs - none of them particularly offensive in themselves but cumulatively irritating and unsightly. There were, for example, in the area under consideration, 221 signs of one sort and another: 148 traffic signs, including 106 'No Waiting' and 'Waiting Limited' signs; 29 Corporation and others, excluding 11 public transport signs; others included some 33 electrical signs on buildings. All these it has proved possible drastically to reduce, in particular by the redesign of certain Ministry of Transport traffic signs and an extended use of the Ministry's experimental yellow kerb line. In many cases the new traffic signs have been affixed directly to the buildings, thus doing away with the previous striped poles.

Bus shelters, seats and litter bins have been replaced by others of improved design. Sand, transformer and switchgear boxes have been removed from the pavements and resited less obtrusively. Telephone kiosks also have been resited. A new and vastly improved lighting scheme for the street, has made possible the replacement of 18 lighting columns and three hanging lights, by 36 lanterns bracketed from the buildings thus noticeably improving the view of the Castle. A number of other lanterns have been converted or installed at particular points.

Of the 120 properties in the area, only a handful have felt unable totally to participate. A number of buildings which were in need of basic repair have made good their street elevations. Those redecorating have conformed to a range of 30 colours and wherever possible buildings in divided ownership have unified the upper parts of their premises. A number of inappropriate signs on buildings have been removed. The Wren-designed Guildhall and Corn Exchange have been cleaned, the statuary repaired and repainting has included the use of a strong peacock blue on the ceiling of the Corn Exchange. The main piers at the entrance to the Parish Church of St. John's have been rebuilt and new wrought iron gates have been made without charge by Mr. J. House, the Corporation blacksmith.

Kerb lines have been changed in three places, primarily for reasons of traffic flow, car parking and pedestrian safety, but the opportunity has been taken at the Park Street corner at the same time to plant trees and install flower tubs. Castle Hill and High Street have both been resurfaced. Floodlighting has been installed

on the Guildhall, the Parish Church, the War Memorial and King George V Memorial; Barclays Bank and The Ship have also contributed special external lighting to their premises.

### The Wall

The biggest single change in the appearance of the High Street has been the removal, by gracious permission of H.M. The Queen, of the boundary wall dividing the Castle from the street. The wall was built a little over a century ago, after the demolition of the small cottages and houses that had previously clustered under the Castle wall itself. Almost 500 ft. long and 6 - 12 ft. high, it blocked the view from many points but served no useful purpose. Its removal, and the clearance of all extraneous street furniture from the pavement it abutted, has brought the Castle right into the town and opened up a most imposing vista. In the autumn two forest trees will be planted near the Salisbury Tower.

The work was carried out by the Ministry of Works, who removed the coping and reset it at pavement level, and by a team of volunteers, organised by the Civic Trust with equipment and other assistance kindly loaned by Messrs. Wimpey. The Trust has for some years organised work camps for the demolition of large-scale eyesores in National Parks and rural areas. It has recently applied the principle to a pilot urban scheme in Stepney and Windsor provided another example of the contribution that can be made to the appearance of our towns by public spirited volunteers. Mr. Duncan Sandys himself knocked out the first stone just before Easter. The team which then took over consisted of twelve students from different parts of the country who camped in a local school, worked for a fortnight in rain and sun and finished their task a day ahead of schedule.

### Conclusion

It must be remembered that in schemes of this kind, streets and buildings are not redesigned ab initio; that neither the Local Authority, nor the Chamber of Trade, nor the Civic Trust have any powers other than the power of persuasion. The extent to which any particular proposals may actually be implemented depends upon individual taste, individual readiness to meet the cost involved, individual trading problems and competition, individual house-styles and redecoration programmes together with a multiplicity of factors, often conflicting, created by public utilities and public accounting.

There remain things in Windsor, between the river and Park Street, which the Civic Trust would have been glad to change but which, usually on grounds of cost, could not be undertaken on this occasion. There may be instanced, as an example, the King George V Memorial at the

corner of Datchet Road: designed for a site that was originally bounded by buildings in Datchet Road, this now sits, since the demolition of the buildings, uneasily upon an axis that no longer relates to the area. The statue of Queen Victoria, at the foot of Castle Hill, might with advantage, it may be thought, be moved either to the grassy embankment surrounding the Salisbury Tower, or to the new paving at Park Street corner where, among the newly planted trees, it could form a welcome focal point. One day, too, it may prove possible to resolve the somewhat indeterminate relationship of the Curfew Tower to the pavement of which it forms the hub, possibly by the construction of a small terrace with seats where shoppers could rest their feet and visitors admire the view.

Such things, however, can still be done in the future. Schemes of this kind are not finite. Towns continue to change and develop and improvements to a town's appearance do not cease to become necessary or possible after an arbitrarily chosen date. What must have struck any visitor to Windsor during April 1961 was the astonishing sense of corporate endeavour shown by the activity in the High Street and Thames Street. In all directions scaffolding, building material and ladders were to be seen; men were painting, drilling, laying paving, installing lights or bus shelters. When a town shows its passionate concern with, and pride in, its appearance in this way, things are unlikely ever to be quite the same again.

*Project  
A. Parsons  
Scheme*