



Coronation Streets: where should the king go to tea?

What is Britain's favourite street?

In April and May 2023, to mark the coronation of King Charles III and to celebrate ten years since our own formation in 2013, [Create Streets](#) invited nominations and votes for Britain's best street as our Coronation Streets competition. This echoed one of very first projects, our [Favourite Street Survey](#) in February 2014.

Which of Britain's many streets was the most beautiful, we asked. Which has the strongest neighbourhood or community? Which is most resonant with emotional or historic meaning? Which provides the best setting for connected and sociably lives well lived? Where do you like to go?

This seemed a fitting way to mark the King's coronation whose support for the creation and sustainable stewardship of beautiful streets and places is nationally and internationally significant and certainly needs no introduction.



In total we received 1,406 votes and nominations for Britain's best street. In clear first place, with 28 per cent of the total vote, was Vicars' Close in Wells, Somerset. To celebrate we have used the AI and CGI Gods of the metaverse to send a virtual King Charles III to tea in Vicars' Close.

Commenting on the results, founding director of Create Streets, Nicholas Boys Smith said:

"Every great street is different but there are some real themes in the streets which people nominated and for which they voted. All were old, attractive and safely walkable. None were dominated by cars. All were well enclosed, had a steady 'beat' of narrow fronts and many doors and variety within that pattern. Featureless facades and metronomic spreadsheet architecture are not the settled will of the British people. This was not a controlled study but the preference of the 1,406 votes we received corroborate perfectly with the preferences of many dozens of visual preference surveys and academic studies, as the King has understood for many years. People like places in which you can feel at home in the world.

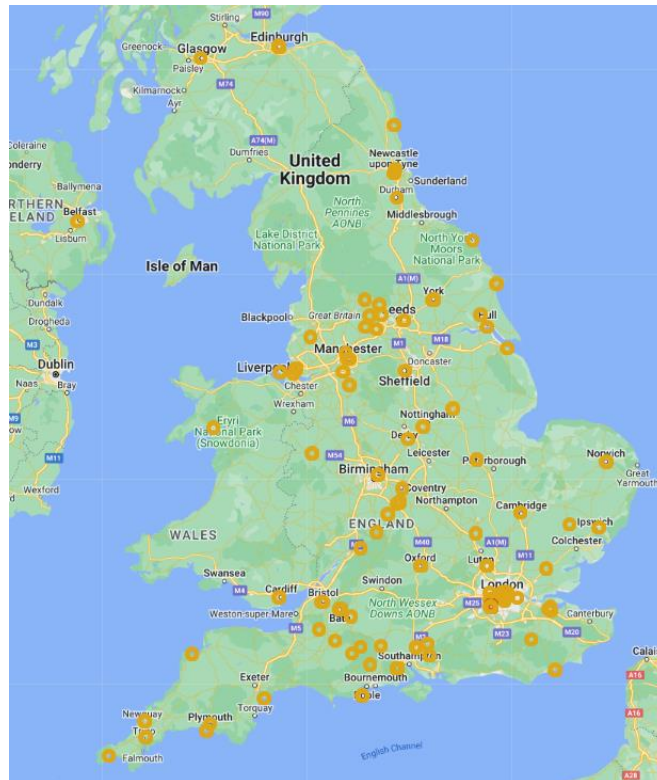
This does not preclude change. All have our streets have changed a lot over the centuries. But they have done so in ways that preserve or even enhances their "streetiness." Our third placed street, Pavilion Road, has recently been lovingly and carefully 'reinvented' from a back street with a few homes to a vibrant place to shop and dine. An absolute masterpiece of urban acupuncture overseen by landowners, the Cadogan Estate, who take their stewarding carefully.

We have used AI and CGI to send a virtual King Charles III to tea in our winning street, Vicars' Close to celebrate the onset of summer. We hope that the virtual King enjoys it and that the real king will be able to visit Vicars' Close as well one day."



What we did and how we did it

- Between 19 April and 10 May, we sought nominations for Britain's favourite street.
- We used our [Create Communities online polling platform](#) and shared to our mailing list of nearly 5,000 and via Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram reaching a total of over 68,000 accounts.
- We received 165 nominations. You can see a map of the nominations below.



- We then picked the ten most nominated streets and two wildcards and polled our followers, again accessing them again via our social media channels and mailing list.
- We used the online platform, Survey Legend and the poll was open from 10 May to 22 May 2023. In total (taking out a few 'bots' who 'had a go') we received 1,241 votes in round two.
- The top three results were:
 1. Vicars Close, Wells (28% of votes / 349 votes);
 2. High Street, Oxford (20% of votes / 248 votes); and
 3. Pavilion Road, London (17% of votes / 206 votes).
- We used photos which gave as fair and as complete a perspective of the street as we could, not just a couple of fine buildings on a sunny day. We also provided a link through to street view.
- To be clear, we have not controlled those voting. We would only claim indicative significance to these results. Nevertheless, they *do* align with pretty much every controlled study ever done and with our improving understanding of what types of places people like and why. (See chapters 6 and 7 of this book, [Of Streets and Squares](#)).



Credit: Shirokazan (Creative Commons)



Credit: David Iliff (Creative Commons)



The full results are set out below:

<i>Street</i>	<i>Votes</i>	<i>Proportion</i>
Vicars Close, Wells	349	28%
High Street, Oxford	248	20%
Pavilion Road, London	206	17%
The Shambles, York	132	11%
Fishpool Street, St Albans	79	6%
Grey Street, Newcastle upon Tyne	55	4%
Hope Street, Liverpool	53	4%
Victoria Street, Edinburgh	46	4%
High Street, Lyndhurst	37	3%
Railton Road, London	16	1%
Regent Square, Penzance	10	1%

New wine in old bottles

A note on our winning street by Create Streets Director, Nicholas Boys Smith

Streets have this habit of hanging about, the most ancient and timeless features of our urban infrastructure. However, Peter Pan-like, they are also forever young. For whereas their routes may be their original routes, the actual experience of moving down them is always being reinvented as street signs, road surfaces and the buildings themselves wear out and are replaced or repaired with each generation and as carts give way to cars and hansoms to hackney cabs.

Even streets which seem antique are younger than they seem. Just as the ashlar stone surface of Westminster Abbey is Victorian or twentieth century. New wine in old bottles.

Our winning Coronation Street, Vicars' Close, is literally medieval. But this does not mean that it was originally an open sewer with servants regularly throwing slops out of the first-floor windows. The 'Blackadder' myth of history is just that, a myth. Many medieval streets and towns were 'planned' by their landowners: from city-wide Salisbury to Vicars' Close in Wells which started life as a cross between employee housing, alms houses and town planning. It was always a good place to be and still is.

It was created in the 1340s for chantry priests who sang in Wells cathedral services and who were known locally as vicars, whence the street's name to this day. It was built as 44 terraced homes in two rows behind a gateway off the cathedral close. At the north end, a fifteenth century vicars' chapel and library close off the street. It is the poshest of cul-de-sacs. Marrying priests following the reformation led to larger clerical households and the number of houses was reduced, ultimately, to 27.

Although the medieval core remains in most of the homes, chimney shafts have been raised, roofs relayed, heraldic shields added and windows replaced with fashionable sashes over the centuries. Only a handful have more than a smattering of their medieval structure still predominantly visible. One house (Shrewsbury House) was entirely rebuilt in the nineteenth century after a fire.

So Vicars' Close is medieval even though it isn't. Why is it so pleasing though? Create Streets' wider work has examined what types of places people instinctively like and, as best we can, why. Nearly everything about the street could have been specifically created to make it feel homely and attractive. It has texture. Its materials do not sheen, bore or threaten. Its stone setts feel timeless though have no doubt been frequently replaced or restored.

The street has pattern and rhythm like a good poem. Those tall late medieval chimneys, above all, march down the street. But it has variety as well. The gates, porches and windows vary from bay to bay, like half rhymes cascading through the different stanzas of the same poem: sash windows or gothic windows, perfectly symmetrical or slightly misaligned windows; picket gate or arched doorway.

The street feels safely enclosed. It has an enclosure ratio of about one to two (height to width) which most people find reasonably pleasing and homely. Each of the houses has a modest front garden. These provide shrubs and greenery which improve the street. (People consistently and provably like a bit of urban greenery). But those modest front gardens are also perfect for chatting to your neighbours and supporting a strong neighbourly community. If front gardens are non-existent, people tend to scuttle straight indoors. If they are too large, they never speak to their neighbours, safely shielded by their privet hedges. A small garden is perfect for a serendipitous chat as you trim the roses or pop out to go to the shops. Good fences, and modest front gardens, do literally make for good neighbours.

Perhaps most artfully of all (and surely deliberately?) the street appears longer than it is due to the crafty deployment of false perspective. The houses at the northern end of the street are 9 feet closer together than those at the street's 'entrance' underneath the gatehouse. This exaggerates the sense of distance and tricks the brain into imputing into the street more length than it really has. Those medieval masons may have had no architectural qualifications but they knew a thing or two about making the brain content and the heart soar. (The street's designer may have been the English master mason, William Joy or, just as probably, those working for him).

In short Vicars' Close feels safe to be in and ridiculously beautiful to look at from the setts underfoot to the gothic chapel at one end and the gatehouse at the other with Wells Cathedral rising heavenward behind.

It is certainly a street fit for a king and worthy of the fine city of Wells. I cannot discover from a quick scan of Mother Google whether the King, when Prince of Wales, ever visited Vicars' Close. I suspect he has but it would not appear to be recent.

At any rate I do hope that he gets the chance to go. I think he will like it.

If you read like to read more about the relationships between the elements of place and popularity do have a look at study I co-authored, [Of Streets and Squares](#).

Nicholas Boys Smith

