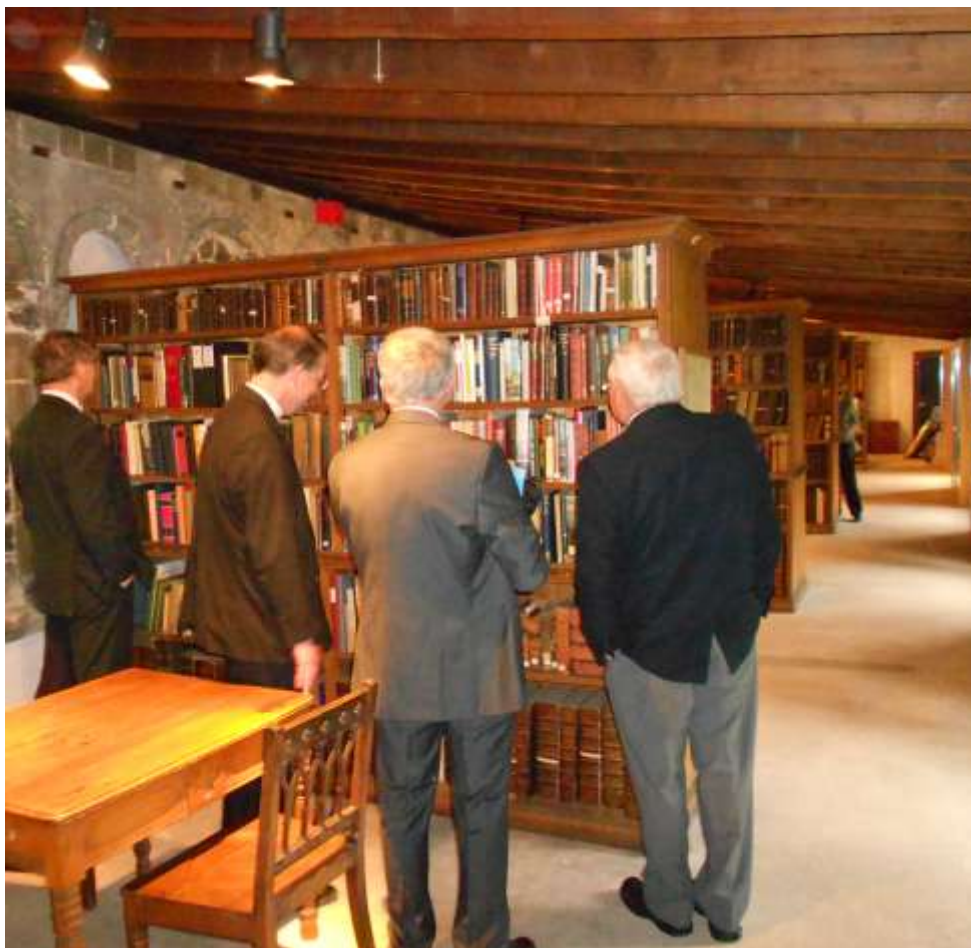


# NORWICH CATHEDRAL EX-CHORISTERS' GUILD

(Founded 1884)



## Newsletter July 2013

**In this edition of your newsletter** Stephen Coleman (1959 – 1963), tells us about a fascinating tour of the library which he made last year. The library, an area which was 'off limits' to us when we were in the choir, houses an unexpected collection.

As a Chorister in the early 1960s I had always been curious about the rooms that are above three sides of the cloisters. Once or twice I had peered around the door at the end of the rooms then used by the Ex-Choristers' Guild and looked out of the windows. The Choir vestry was, of course, directly opposite, on the east side of the cloisters and next to it, the music library - but what about all the other rooms? I had no idea, although I had vaguely heard of the existence of a Cathedral Library and had speculated that it might contain ancient medieval manuscripts chained to their original dusty oak shelves. So, when the opportunity came to be given a guided tour of the Cathedral Library, I jumped at the chance.

The entrance to the Library is at the top of one of the stairways leading to the Refectory. I and several other ex-choristers gathered there. The Reverend Dr Peter Doll, Canon Librarian, immediately disabused us of the idea that there were ancient books of oak bound vellum within. These, he explained, had been removed from the Cathedral in the sixteenth century by Archbishop Matthew Parker who was a great collector of old books and manuscripts and they now form part of the Parker Library at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.

I have to say I felt a sense of outrage that books belonging to Norwich Cathedral should have been "stolen" and removed to Cambridge but it appears that Archbishop Parker saved a good many Anglo-Saxon and Medieval documents that might otherwise have ended up as Tudor food wrappings. English history probably owes Archbishop Parker a tremendous debt.

The books that were on immediate display, as we entered the Library, were donated to Norwich Cathedral by Lincoln Theological Institute after its closure and are mostly of an academic nature. Dr Doll took us through into a long gallery that is above the south side of the cloisters. Here were books from the Dean and Chapter's Historic Collection and soon there were yelps of excitement from our group as we discovered gems of local Norfolk and Norwich history. We obviously need to get out more.

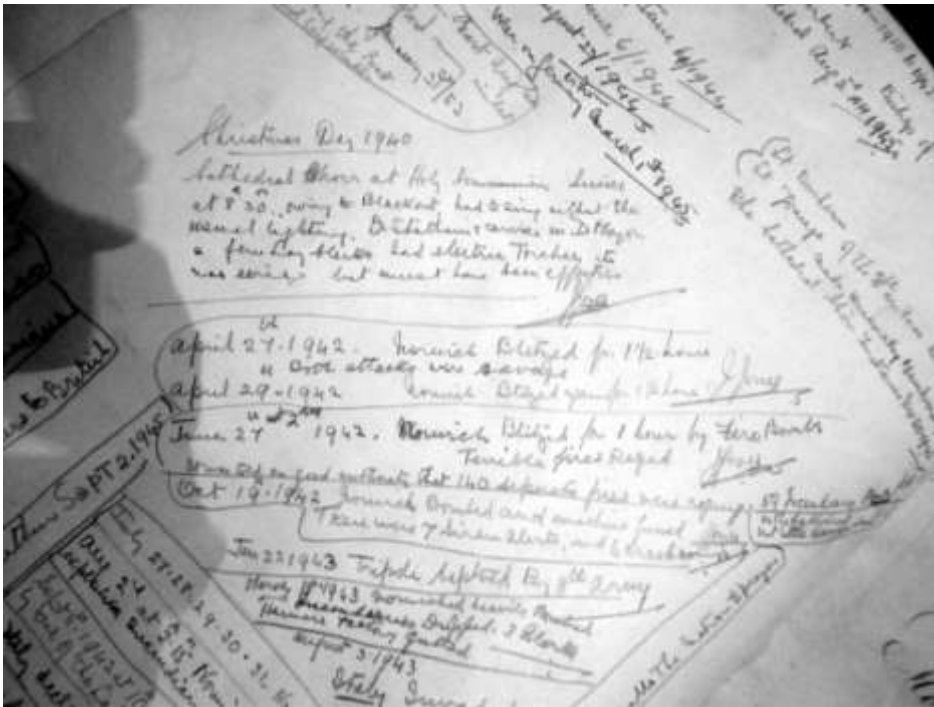
There was a real sense of disappointment when we had to tear ourselves away, to be taken along the east side of the Library, but the best was yet to come. Here were books of eighteenth and nineteenth century church music and a general storage area.

Dr Doll had set out some books on a table for us to inspect. There were old part books and an enormous volume of Dr William Boyce's "Cathedral Music" printed in 1773. On the blank page opposite the frontispiece were pencil jottings and as we looked closely we realised that they had been written at intervals between 1940 and 1953, probably in quiet moments during or between Cathedral services and were signed "J. Jones." (*Joseph Jones was a bass on decani. He was always very well dressed with a trilby hat and a walking stick. He wore spats on Sundays. In Frank Bates' book he writes of Joseph as singing solos for the Norwich Philharmonic and also singing with artistes such as Elsie Suddaby.*)

Here are some examples of his jottings:

"**Christmas Day 1940**, Cathedral Choir at Holy Communion Service at 8.30 am owing to Blackout had to sing without the usual lighting. Dr Statham's service(?) in D major a few lay clerks had electric torches, it was eerie but must have been effective. J Jones."

"**April 27<sup>th</sup> 1942**, Norwich blitzed for one and a half hours. **April 29<sup>th</sup> 1942**, Norwich blitzed again for one and a half hours. Both attacks were savage." (*The Baedeker raids - ed.*)



“**June 27<sup>th</sup> 1942**, Norwich blitzed by fire bombs. Terrible fires raged. It was told on good authority that 140 separate fires were raging. 59 incendiary bombs fell on the Cathedral.”

“**October 19<sup>th</sup> 1942**, Norwich bombed and machine gunned there were 7 siren alerts and 6 crash (?) landings.”

“**Lt Burham (?) and Lt Youngs (?)** of the Eighth Air Force, American Army were made honorary members of the Cathedral Choir. First service **March 20<sup>th</sup> 1943**.”

“**31<sup>st</sup> January 1953**, Coast defences in East Anglia break and flood many miles. Severe gales also all along the coast. A hard and long winter.”

It would be interesting to hear from anybody who might remember the Christmas Day services of 1940 and whether anybody can remember the two American officers who were honorary members of the choir? Their names do not seem to appear on the roll of honour of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Air Division kept in Norwich Library so it is to be hoped that they survived the war.

Dr Doll led us into one final room, small with grey painted cupboards, now used for storage. It slowly dawned on us where we were ... in our old choristers' vestry - and there was the spiral staircase down to the South Transept where we would line up before services. The old washbasins were gone but the cupboards where our cassocks and surplices had hung were still there and now had a preservation order on them. What memories!

I know we all thoroughly enjoyed our tour of the Cathedral Library many thanks to Dr Doll for giving up his time to show us around.

**Stephen Coleman**

**Sadly** we have to report the deaths of three former choristers. **Alwyn (Freddie) Blyth**, **Malcolm Jones**, and **Ted Wragg** (to whom last July's newsletter was dedicated). May they Rest in Peace. Please pray for them and for their families.

**At our Annual General Meeting, held on 18<sup>th</sup> May:**

We Elected **Ayrton Westwood** as Chair, **Robert Woodcock** as vice Chair, **Jon Burrell** as Secretary and **Nick Potts** as Treasurer.

Elected on to the Committee were **Tim Ashcroft, Ivor Bartram, John Clarke, Richard Hunt, Graham Jones, Terry Nicholl and Paul Rayner**. In addition **Lionel Stone** and **Robert Woodcock** hold the post of Secretary Emeritus.

We are always looking for members on the Committee who can represent their time - or decade, and if you could spare the time for a couple of committee meetings a year, please do let us know.

The AGM was followed by **Choral Evensong**, and **Dinner** in the evening. At Dinner we heard some fascinating tales of espionage and counter-espionage from Geoff Gillion, and were entertained with musical items by the Ex-Choristers' Barbershop Quartet. It was an altogether very entertaining evening.

**Dates for your diary:**

**1<sup>st</sup> December 2013, Advent Sunday social.** This will be after the Carol Procession, at about 1930. It was really well supported last year; please do book the date to come if you can.

**2<sup>nd</sup> February 2014**, 12 midday, Ex-Choristers' Concert, given by ex-choristers who are still at Norwich School. Details from the School.

**17<sup>th</sup> May 2014**, AGM, Choral Evensong and dinner.

**Email communication:** As a preference, we now distribute Newsletters and events letters by email rather than by post to those who have opted for this. If you wish to switch over to email, or to receive email in addition, please send the Secretary a short email request, and of course be sure to keep him updated on any changes of email address!

**Contact us:**

**Website:** Cathedral.org.uk and visit NCexCG entry via “Music”.

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