

## THE ANGLICAN TRADITION OF CHORAL MUSIC Talk given by Paul Hale, Rector Chori 12.10.02

There is always the worry about whether there are enough tenors, most choirs have none or too many.

### Music in the Minster

Why do we have music in church and what role does it play? There are practical reasons for sung music. It provides better projection of the text. The tradition of sung music goes back to the Old Testament - the Jews have no said psalms. The liturgy developed slowly. Plain song is derived from the temple chants inspired by various Popes. Orthodox services are 100% sung.

The earliest singing was by the 16 canons of the church but they had other tasks to perform. The parishes had a rector, who was assisted by a vicar. A Vicar Choral stood in for each of the 16 canons. At Southwell there were 13 Chantry Priests, who lived where the Minster Centre now stands. The Vicars Choral lived in Vicars Court.

In 1248 the choir had to check what they had to sing and sing without books. In 1499 a Rector Chori was appointed. There were 2 schools for the choristers the song school and the Grammar School - so called as Latin was studied. The choir was provided to praise and honour God and for repetition and adornment of the church. The music of the day was more elaborate than plain song and the repertoire became more extensive. By the 16th and 17th century the boys were skilled in singing renaissance music. Anglican music dates from this time.

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It was not until the late 19th century that music was printed. Boyce compiled a list of subscribers to his printed music in the 1780s and at this time the repertoire was limited.

Cromwell's men during the Civil War damaged many organs - there were then 3 organs in the Minster and singing was temporarily lost at this time - the late 17th century.

During the 1400s many canons were admonished during the visitations of the Archbishops of York.

The biggest changes came about in the 1600s with the advent of the Prayer Book etc. At this time the Minster was wealthy. In 1835 the Collegiate status was removed and land and income was appropriated. The Canons were disbanded and the Minster became under the auspices of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. In 1884 the Diocese of Southwell was created. In the 19th century the two schools were amalgamated and the choristers are, in many ways, a great asset to the school.

Paul then went on to discuss the various organists, who had worked at Southwell Minster, many of them well known. Dr. Ashfield founded the choir as it is now. The Minster choir is directed in much the same way as in other cathedrals. Dr. Ashfield produced a list of chant books known as the Southwell Psalter. Paul has developed this by word processing and re-binding - the production of this has been made possible by a bequest by Provost Pratt. At one time it was the practice for the Rector Chori to be Head of Music at the school and, in fact, Paul's predecessor, Kenneth Beard, held this post until just a few years before his retirement.

Paul said there would always be a problem recruiting lay clerks, who were prepared to sing in the choir most days of the week and learn a large repertoire of music of over 1000 years, there being 550 pieces in the music library. The lay clerks need to have other jobs, as a lay clerk they earn £4,000 a year. It is also becoming much harder to recruit choristers, despite various initiatives, less people go to church, some parents are divorced and some parents see the choir as a place where a difficult boy can be "sorted out". Usually there are 12 boys a year in training. Paul pointed out that it is only in Britain where choirs sing services daily. This tradition is now influencing places abroad including the U.S.A. and France.