

## **THE HISTORIC LIBRARY** By R.M.Beaumont and L.F.Craik, Honorary Librarians

N.B. Some of the information in this article is out of date but it has been included for the historical details. Please see the list of updates for the present whereabouts of some of the listed items

It is certain that the Minster possessed a library before the Civil War although we know very little about it. The White Book has a reference to some books belonging to the parish altar in 1369. In 1548 "certaine books in the librarie" were valued by the Chantry Commissioners of Edward VI as being worth £12 or £14. Probably these were seized with other valuables.

The result of this and the Civil War, with the scattering of books and charters by the Scottish soldiers in the churchyard in 1645, is that nothing survived except a few precious remnants of manuscripts. These include the White Book and a few other registers, some incomplete. Possibly these survived because they had been kept in a house outside the Minster.

After 1660 the energies of the Chapter were inevitably concentrated on repairs to the Minster and the Prebendal houses, but by 1690 a start was made in creating a new library. A fine collection of books was given by Edward Lee of Norwell. In later years books were being purchased. No printed book now in the library is earlier than 1500. The Chapter collected books on any subject. History, geography, law, science and medicine are well represented, as well as Bibles, sermons and the writings of theologians.

The library also acquires books and pamphlets of local historical or diocesan interest, and has useful collections of the diocesan magazine and Register.

Apart from the printed books the library houses the manuscripts relating to the Chapter. These include decree books, accounts, archbishops' visitations, marriage bonds, terriers and parish register transcripts of all the parishes in the diocese. In the twentieth century a collection of photographs, negatives and slides has accumulated relating to the Minster and Southwell. The library has also the modern archive records of the cathedral council, the parochial council and committees.

At first the library was established in the old grammar school chamber which was on the outside of the south wall of the nave. Later it was moved to a room on the west side of the south choir transept, then to the room which is now the Pilgrims Chapel, and finally to the room above it. The parish register transcripts are stored in a room above the north porch.

The chapter Decree Books contain many orders regulating the use of the library. The first catalogue was ordered to be made in 1698, though the earliest one in existence is dated 18 years later. And it is satisfactory to record that despite the various moves and frequent expressions of the Chapter's concern at the lack of control over the use of books, the measures taken to preserve them seem to have worked fairly well. Nearly all the 368 books recorded in 1716 are still present. The total number today approaches 4000.

Among the more interesting "secular" works are Aristotle (1502), Ortelius' Atlas (1557), Raleigh's History of the World (1614), Beaumont and Fletcher (1647), Wellington's Despatches (19 volumes), and Handel's Works (first collected edition).

Visitors to cathedrals sometimes wonder what is the use of a collection of largely out-of-date books seldom consulted. Cathedral libraries are storehouses of primary research material for the theologian, church historian, musicologist and student of the humanities. A library is also of importance as a storage space for ephemeral material which a cathedral provides about current church matters, some of which may become of historical value at a later date.

In recent years the library has increasingly become an important source of information requested by family historians and people exploring the history of local churches. The parish registers contain family names from earlier centuries, and other records contain the names of local clergy, churchwardens, patrons and other officials. I receive letters from the United States, New Zealand, as well as from other parts of this country, and can often provide help which is much appreciated.