

## TWENTY COMMON QUESTIONS

By Margaret Henson & Letty Lewenz, 8 January 1994

This was a fairly lighthearted revision/introductory talk, incorporating much material from previous factsheets – references are shown after the question

1. What is the difference between a Minster and a Cathedral? [33, 4]

A Cathedral is a church in which a Bishop has his cathedra, or throne. Most English Cathedrals of medieval origin were linked to monastic establishments.

A Minster had its origins in the Anglo-Saxon system of governing large churches through a group of secular canons (a college). In Southwell, this system was formally established by the Charter of 956, so we have been a Minster for over 1000 years, but a Cathedral for only just over 100 (since 1884). After the Conquest, the Normans introduced a monastic system in many cases, but not here.

2. Why is there such a large church in such a small town? [19]

In the Anglo-Saxon era, the size of a settlement was not as relevant as its holiness. Was our well a holy well, perhaps even from pagan times? Our situation was fairly strategic: 2-3 miles from a ford leading to the Fosseway, yet just above the flood plain. All towns were very small then. Southwell just failed to grow, probably it was too near to Newark.

3. Which is the oldest part of the Minster? [5,7]

The mosaic pavement under the Bread Pews in the South Transept. This was originally part of the Villa found on this site in the 1950s, but probably moved to provide a floor for the earliest church, built in the 7th century. That church was either replaced or enlarged at the time of the Charter of 956. Of this period, nothing remains but part of a pillar, propped in a corner of the sanctuary. The 11thC tympanum would have originally been in this church.

4. When was the present church built?

The nave and crossing between 1108 and about 1160, as part of the great move towards rebuilding in the Romanesque style during the Norman period. The central tower was completed by 1170. Quire was originally Norman, but as the number of clergies grew, it was found to be too small, and was replaced about 100 years after construction by the present Early English Quire. The chapel now designated as the Pilgrims' Chapel was added by 1260, and the Chapter House in the 1290's (completed by 1300). By 1300 the Minster was virtually completed, except for the Pulpitum (1330's) and the Great West Window (15thC).

5. How long is it?

98 metres: the nave 59 metres, the Quire 39 metres. The nave is 19 metres wide.

6. Why did they make it so big?

To impress and over-awe a subject people; as a suitable church for the Archbishop of York on his visits, and to the greater glory of God, Norman building-techniques first made large stone buildings a possibility.

7. How did they manage to build it? [3, 43]

Their tools were very primitive: they only had ox-power for haulage, and manpower for raising stones (N.B. 14 cubic feet of stone weighs 1 ton!), but they were literate and had a knowledge of geometry. They made drawings on parchment or paper, and traced them on the lodge floor for the cutting of mouldings, etc. The masons were their own architects.

8. What are the marks on some pillars? [15]

Masons each had their own marks, a kind of signature, and it identified their own work as a basis for payment.

9. What was the Chapter House for?

It was for the business meetings of the canons (prebendaries) – not a chapel and not for worship.

10. How did they decide which leaves to carve? [6, 24]

Partly those of interesting shapes, but also for their symbolism. Eg oak, a sacred tree, a symbol of strength. Ivy and buttercup supposedly warded off disease in cattle. Hawthorn a protection against lightning.

11. Is there any medieval glass in the Minster? [10,27, 31]

Very little left after the Parliamentary Army used it as a stable, and that only in fragments. These have been put together into one window in the south Quire Aisle, and in the case by the West door. Glass in the Chapter House came from other churches. Our older most valuable and most beautiful glass, the four lower lights in the East Window was not made for this church.

12. Is the nave roof the original one? [40]

In 1711 the S.W. tower was struck by lightning and the roof destroyed by fire. It was replaced by a lower-pitched roof, lower than the top of the west window, which had to be enclosed in a kind of box. The present wagon-type roof was put in by Ewan Christian in about 1880, and is probably similar in style to the original.

13. Are people really buried under the nave floor? [40]

The monuments which form part of the floor are not graves, but were brought in from the churchyard to provide a new floor by Ewan Christian, but there probably were people buried under the floor in the Middle Ages,

14. What caused the damage to the Chapter House carvings and to a pillar in the south nave arcade? Why don't you repair them? [6, 24]

Most damage to the carvings is due to constant touching. Please warn children not to touch - only blind visitors may do so. Other damage is vandalism. The pillar in the nave must have been cut away for an altar or canopy - though, not a chantry altar. It is not repaired because it is of historic interest.

15. How many bells are there? [8]

There is a ring of 12 bells in D major, with a 13th bell rung for occasional services. These bells are unique in being hung counter clockwise.

16. What is the thing on the table at the end of the Chapter House passage?

When an exhibition of modern art was held in the Chapter House, containing works by 2 brothers from Beeston, Provost Irvine was asked to choose one to

keep for the Minster, and this was his choice. It is not known what was in the Artist's mind, but a personal interpretation links it to the line of a hymn "Raise the stone and thou shalt find me, cleave the wood and I am there".

17. Where are the mice? [26]

**On the altar rails at the High Altar and in St Thomas's chapel, as well as on the Bishops throne and two kneeling stools nearby.** All from Robert, "Mousey", **Thompson's workshop** at Kilburn, North Yorks. No living mice as far as is known.

18. What is the chest by the South door? [41]

It is for house copes, the ceremonial cloaks worn by Bishops and other clergy. They can thus be stored flat, whereas folding would damage them. Our oldest and most beautiful copes can be seen on the memorials to Bishop Riddings and Bishop Hoskyns.

19. What is the figure over the arch at the head of the nave?

The Christos Rex, or Reigning Christ, by Peter Ball, a local artist, who also made the figure of Christ, the Light of the World in the Candle Chapel, and the Pieta in the south transept, in memory of Pamela Irvine. The Christos Rex is of oak and elm, covered in copper and gold leaf.

20. Why do you have a memorial to the Katyn massacre?

We were asked to have one by the very sizeable Polish Community, as being near to the Polish War Cemetery in Newark.