

FACT SHEET No 99

THE MINSTER LIBRARY

By LAURENCE CRAIK 12 JANUARY 2002

Introduction

This is the first fact sheet on the Library since Factsheet no.14 in 1990, and I trust you will not mind if I repeat some of the information that Harold Brooke provided.

Origin, growth and location

It is certain that the Minster had a library before the Civil War, although we know little about it. We have a few manuscripts from the medieval period, principally the White Book, but little else, as soldiers scattered books and manuscripts in the churchyard in 1645. Effectively, the library was set up afresh by the Chapter in the 1690's. By 1736 it had 742 books, and by 1800 it had over 1,500. The present library has some 3,000 printed books, as well as the Minster archives.

In the 1600's the library was located in a building by the southwest tower which housed the library and the school. This building was demolished in 1784, and the library was moved to a new building located south of the quire, with a door into the south transept. This proved unsatisfactory, and in 1825 it was demolished. The library then moved to what is now the Pilgrim's Chapel. In the 1880's, during Ewan Christian's period of re-building, it was moved to its present location.

Librarians

Before the 20th century, Minster librarians were normally clergymen. The last librarian appointed by the old Chapter, Minor Canon R R Smith, was in charge until his death in 1900.

W.A.James. In 1919 Archdeacon Conybeare appointed W.A. James as librarian. Mr James had retired to Southwell, and was fascinated by Southwell and its history. He put an immense amount of time into transcribing and indexing some of the important archives, and the parish registers for the Minster and some other local parishes. He fell out with Provost Heywood after 1945, and left all his papers to Professor Frank Stenton at Reading University.

Richard Beaumont. After James's death in 1949, Provost Heywood appointed Richard Beaumont as Librarian. He was a solicitor by training, who became Diocesan Registrar, and his legal background and knowledge of Latin were extremely useful to him as librarian. He put much effort into repair and rebinding of books, cataloguing and organisation of the archives. Much work was done in the conservation of a large collection of photographs by A.J.Loughton made in the 20th century. I gave help in the 1970's in the cataloguing of the printed books, resulting in a card author catalogue. Richard remained Librarian until his retirement in 1988.

Harold Brooke: Harold took over in 1989 and put much effort into improving the library. He found some Roman remains of an altar, which were sold, providing over £20,000 which was invested to produce income for the library. A computer was purchased, and a computer catalogue/inventory of the library's books and archives was produced. Harold also did much to improve the physical condition of archives. He succeeded in recovering W A James's books and indexes from Reading University, and a large quantity of records from the Church Commissioners covering Ewan Christian's work on the rebuilding of the Minster during the 19th century. His book 'Closed for Business' was the result. Sadly, he died in 1997.

Laurence Craik: Having retired from the County Library, I wrote to the Provost after Harold had

died and offered my services. These were accepted, and I have done a part-time job ever since, carrying on Harold's work, answering enquiries and dealing with the substantial number of new books and archives.

Duties of the librarian:

1. Care of the books and archives, and the Bishop's Transcripts kept in the Parvis Room. Supervising a team of NADFAS volunteers who help to conserve the bindings of the printed books.
2. Opening the library to the public on bank holidays and similar occasions.
3. Responding to the many and varied enquiries raised by visitors, scholars and others. Many of these are in writing, including enquiries from America, Australia and New Zealand, and many, if not most, are on family history topics.
4. Cataloguing new acquisitions to the stock of printed books and archives.

Books

1. Older books: the majority are on theological topics, but the library does have substantial number of books on music, literature, history, law and science published in earlier centuries. Enquiries for the older books are rare, unfortunately.
2. Local history and diocesan history: the library has a collection of books and pamphlets on Nottinghamshire history, including a full set of the Transactions of the Thoroton Society. It also has a set of the Diocesan Magazine started by Bishop Ridding in 1885, and of more recent local church publications such as '20 Churches', 'Leaves' and 'See'. These are very helpful in answering queries on local churches, clergy, churchwardens and activities in the diocese.

Archives

These are by far the most valuable section of the Library, and would be impossible to replace. Among the more important groups of archives are:

1. Official pre-1850 Chapter records, including Chapter Act Books, accounts, and records of leases of land owned by the Chapter. Modern 20c. official records include the minutes of the Cathedral Chapter, the Cathedral Council, the Parochial Church Council, and material from occasions such as Flower Festivals.
2. Minster parish registers (excluding current registers) have been moved from the Strongroom to the Library. The Library also has W A James's indexes to baptisms, marriages and deaths up to 1837, which are very helpful for family history enquiries. To have post-1837 indexes would be even better!
3. Bishop's Transcripts (kept in the Parvis room): these exist for all parishes in the county, for the period from 1598 to 1837, but the files have many local gaps, especially the period 1640-1660. The transcripts have all been microfilmed, and are readily available to the public at the County Archives Office.
4. Photographs: we have many hundreds of photographs of the Minster made by Alfred Loughton, a local photographer, many of them in glass negative form. The glass negatives have been copied, and people can obtain prints by co-operation with the County Library.