The choral foundation of Durham Cathedral, c. 1350 - c. 1650


Abstract

The muniments of Durham cathedral, city, and diocese have been explored in order to present and assess the contribution made by lay musicians to worship in the cathedral. By 1335-60 the boys and men had become sufficiently established to merit specific payments. Whether or not the lay Cantor dates back that far is uncertain, but in 1390 it was agreed that what was required was a Cantor-Instructor. No proof for the implementation of this earlier than 1415 has come to light, nor has any contract earlier than that made by the monastery with John steel in 1430. From it and those of his successors, and from Rites of Durham, a picture emerges of the Cantor's duties and of the part played by boys and men in the daily Lady Mass in the Galilee chapel and in the Mass of the Name of Jesus on Fridays in the nave. Following the suppression of its monastic arm in 1539 Durham was re-constituted a cathedral only in 1541. The pattern of worship established c.1560 continued until the 1620s, when the innovations introduced by John Cosin caused Peter Smart (a Calvinist) to preach a vituperative sermon on 27 July 1628. From the litigation which ensued much emerges about whole ordering of worship in Durham since the 1560s. Produced whilst the ceremonialists held sway were several sets of new music books for the choir. Some 40% of these are still in Durham. such is the detail in the muniments that it has proved possible to suggest when the books were transcribed and by whom. It has also proved possible to identify the contributions of no fewer than eight Durham scribes to the music books at Peterhouse, Cambridge. That their work should be so far afield is explained by the fact that when John Cosin became Master of Peterhouse in 1635 he re-established the post of College organist and drew heavily upon the Durham repertoire. The succession of Cantors and Masters of the Choristers provided the framework on which to interweave details of their lives, historical events and musical developments. Biographical information relating to the other members of the choir has been assembled in Appendix 1. This is followed other Appendices many of which present together all occurrences of certain fields of information.

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by Saint Aidan at the behest of Oswald of Northumbria around AD 635. The see lasted until AD 664, at which point it was translated to York. Construction of the cathedral began in 1093 at the eastern end. The choir was completed by 1096 and work proceeded on the nave of which the walls were finished by 1128, and the high vault complete by 1135. The Chapter House, demolished in the 18th century, was built between 1133 and 1140.[3] William died in 1099 before the building's completion, passing responsibility to his successor Ranulf Flambard who also built Flamwell Bridge, the first crossing of the River Wear in the town.