



SUMMER 2017 CATHEDRAL TOUR

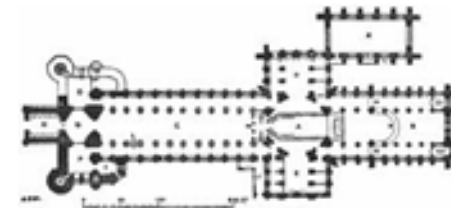
This year the Collinsons' cathedral tour took us to the east of the country - a little nearer home than usual.


 Our first destination was Peterborough, a cathedral we know fairly well. The services here are always welcoming and we know several of the congregation by sight if not by name even being able to comment if someone we consider to be a 'regular' is absent! The Sunday morning Eucharist is very similar to ours and proceeds without any unnecessary announcement or fuss ensuring that those present can concentrate on the worship without distraction. For some reason on this occasion the sermon was not related in any way to the readings which was strange. Refreshments are served afterwards in the transept (one day they'll get round to having decaf drinks!). There are always lots of children around from toddlers to teenagers, both boys and girls although as this was an August visit the numbers were down because the various children's groups were on holiday.




 The following Sunday we allowed ourselves a rare lie-in knowing that we planned to attend a Choral Evensong. Ely was our choice - again a cathedral we like very much. With regular choirs taking their own summer breaks the opportunity arises to hear visiting choirs in buildings which for many are unfamiliar. It is interesting to hear how well they adapt to their surroundings and the different acoustics. For the choir singing at Ely - that of St Matthew's, Northampton - there was no problem at all. The musical pedigree of this particular church is of the highest standard and it can hold its own against any cathedral choir. We first came across

them when our son Richard did an RSCM Course there one year. It was good to see that even the youngest of parish choristers sings with them at these services but not surprisingly for one small boy the effort of concentration after what would have been many hours of rehearsal was almost too much and his head sagged as he no doubt thought of home and bed! The exhilaration of the music in such a wonderful building with the sun coming in through massive windows was totally moving but the set lessons were difficult and possibly rather unhelpful to visitors who do not attend church regularly.



 A short break in Liverpool meant we could pay a quick visit to the Anglican cathedral there. A truly awesome edifice but sadly one which does nothing for me. I find it cold and austere with little atmosphere. It was also very difficult to find any good information about the services being held. If I wanted to hire it, have a meal there, stage an exhibition, or put on an event that wouldn't be problem, but come to service? Perhaps it's just me being awkward. In fact time restraints meant we couldn't fit in a service anyway but that's not the point!

 Back south our next port of call was Bury St Edmunds for the morning service. This cathedral is the also the parish church of St James and was raised to cathedral status in 1914. Although a mainly old building, the east end was completely rebuilt in the twentieth century. It is frequently said that old churches and cathedrals were far more colourful in the past with bright wall paintings and decorated columns. This building was certainly bright as the whole nave was filled with scaffolding, the tall steel col-

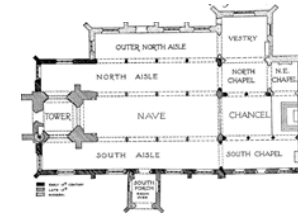
folding, the tall steel columns echoing the stone pillars, and each column wrapped in bright orange foam cladding! This did not detract in any way however and the congregation sang with gusto complementing the visiting choir from Imperial College - a young chamber choir who led us in musical settings by Padilla, a Mexican Spanish composer whose work was completely new to me.

We left the serenity of the service and crossed into a sun-drenched town hosting a wonderful international food festival. There were stalls selling every kind of sustenance with samples galore in a truly cosmopolitan atmosphere. Finding lunch was not a problem!



From a fleeting visit in the middle of the month to the longest and overall fifth largest cathedral in the world, Liverpool, our final trip was to the second smallest in Britain. Chelmsford is another parish church which became a cathedral in 1914. We made the trip by train and arrived for the 11.15 am Choral Eucharist. The building was abuzz with conversation and music. Those who had attended the Communion immediately before were chatting and drinking coffee with those arriving for our service and consequently there was a good mix of people. There are four services each Sunday morning - a said Communion, Breakfast with the Bible, Parish Eucharist and Choral Eucharist. The choir was having a final rehearsal and so we had time to find a chair (not a pew in sight) and prepare ourselves for the worship. Again, such are the benefits of 'Common' Worship, that everything was familiar. The visiting choir here was much more mature in years than the others we had heard and seemed to have more difficulty with the acoustic but nevertheless led us well. Their sermon took its theme from the Romans passage set for the epistle and looked at the idea of vengeance and the wrath of God taking as a starting point the controversial lines 'Till on that cross as Jesus died, The wrath of God was satisfied' from

the hymn *In Christ alone*. We were made very welcome and the church is obviously very inclusive to the extent that there was even a pet dog on a leash with its owner at the altar rail!



All credit must be given to the choirs who year by year provide music for our cathedrals and abbeys during the holiday periods. Many are parish church or college choirs who give up their own precious holiday to sing. It is a wonderful opportunity for them to experience singing in these glorious buildings but I can assure you from my own experience that such visits involve months of initial practice and then hours of rehearsal in the cathedrals themselves before each service. The concentrated effort can be very tiring especially for the youngest and oldest members. The resident choirs themselves do not get off lightly either. Most of the singers from the cathedrals we visited were touring other countries giving recitals, showcasing the wonderful English Cathedral sound or having the chance to offer their worshipping in other cathedrals.



So ended another summer of alternative worship. We return to St Mary's renewed (I hope) and replenished with ideas and insights into different ways of doing things. Some will say that because we generally only visit cathedrals we are not getting a rounded view of Anglican worship but our visits are not intended to be fact-finding tours, just our way of being able to take a break and participate in services where we are not doing any kind of 'job'.

Where will next year take us?