

What's Going On?

A survey of the extent to which girls' choirs sang at nine English cathedrals during 2004

Tim Rogerson

The reasons for starting the research which has led to the writing of this article are no longer obvious to the writer. Suffice it to say that, throughout 2004, he kept a record of which choirs were publicised as singing the services at nine English Anglican Cathedrals. All of the data were collected from the on-line music lists published on the Internet sites of the cathedrals or the cathedral choirs themselves. The Editor of the CTCC Bulletin heard about this work and was keen that the results should be available to the Campaign's members.

The aim of publishing this information is to enable readers of the bulletin to see for themselves what is really happening at those cathedrals where girls' choirs have been established.

The cathedrals covered are Exeter, Gloucester, Lincoln, Norwich, Sheffield, Southwark, Wells, Winchester and York. They were selected solely on the basis that they have the necessary information available on the Internet and have more than one 'cathedral choir'. Information on Bristol was collected from January to July, but at that point the cathedral's website stopped being updated regularly. Salisbury and Chester Cathedrals do not indicate which choir is singing at which services on their music lists.

It is clear from the research that there are two distinct ways in which girls' choirs have been introduced into our cathedrals. The first might conveniently be called the 'Salisbury' model. A separate treble line made up of girls was formed to sing with the men and replaced the boys at around half of the services sung by the choir. On rare occasions (but significantly when the largest congregations are present) the two treble lines sing together with the men. This approach has been followed at Exeter, Lincoln, Sheffield, Wells and York.

Bristol Cathedral claims to have pioneered a second approach ('Bristol fashion'), where a separate girls' choir was formed (which may or may not sing with the men) to sing one or two services a week, either replacing the boys' choir or singing at a time when the service was previously said. This model has been followed at Southwark, Norwich and Winchester. An interesting variation on the second model has been used at Gloucester, where the second choir is called the 'Youth Choir' and relies on young men of a similar age to the girls to supply the lower parts.

Before going on to consider each of the cathedrals in turn, it will be useful to see a summary of the raw data. There are all sorts of caveats which must be considered as forming an integral part of the data. Although every effort has been made to ensure that it contains no errors, there may be some. It has not been possible to re-check all of the information, as cathedral music lists are often published for only a month at a time and so cannot be re-created. Not all services sung by the choirs are disclosed on cathedral music lists and some services or concerts may be sung elsewhere and will, therefore, also not appear. But the writer is convinced that, for the purposes of this article, there is sufficient accuracy to avoid it being labelled 'misleading'.

The table below shows six different combinations, and the percentage of services sung by each of the combinations during 2004 is given.

G is girls with men; F is girls only; B is boys with men; C is boys only; M is men only; whilst O covers any other combination, which might be boys, girls and men, senior boys and girls and men, boys and

girls only and so on.

Exeter		G	F	B	C	M	O
		30%	3%	54%	2%	5%	6%
Gloucester		G	F	B	C	M	O
		15%	0%	75%	0%	9%	1%
Lincoln		G	F	B	C	M	O
		30%	13%	48%	2%	2%	5%
Norwich		G	F	B	C	M	O
		8%	8%	70%	1%	12%	1%
Sheffield		G	F	B	C	M	O
		24%	11%	38%	4%	20%	3%
Southwark		G	F	B	C	M	O
		3%	23%	62%	0%	10%	2%
Wells		G	F	B	C	M	O
		27%	5%	43%	8%	13%	4%
Winchester		G	F	B	C	M	O
		13%	0%	70%	0%	14%	3%
York		G	F	B	C	M	O
		39%	1%	54%	0%	3%	3%

Exeter

In a typical week, there are nine sung services at Exeter, four on Sundays and five others, being Evensong on all of the other days except Wednesday. The Sunday evening service is sung by a voluntary choir, whilst the remaining eight services are sung by combinations of boys, girls and men. Weekends are usually split equally between the boys and girls (both with men); one group will do both Evensongs and the other group will do the two Sunday morning services. Both choirs sing together at Christmas, Easter and on a few other occasions. During the week, the boys and men usually sing on Tuesdays and Fridays, whilst the girls and men sing on Mondays. The men sing alone occasionally.

Gloucester

The Cathedral Choir (of boys and men) still sings the majority of the services at Gloucester—two on Sundays and then on Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday evenings. The Youth Choir (comprising girls and young men and reported in the table above as ‘G’) sings on Thursday evenings. There are also occasional men-only services. The two choirs do not usually sing together.

Lincoln

The service schedule at Lincoln is identical to that of Exeter, except that there is no Sunday evening voluntary choir service. Here, the weekend services are shared between the girls and the boys (both with the men). Typically, the choir which sings Friday evensong will also sing Sunday Evensong, with the other group singing Saturday Evensong and the two Sunday morning services. Monday Evensong is usually girls only. Tuesday and Friday are usually boys and men. Thursday is usually girls and men. Occasionally, the men or the boys sing alone. The two choirs sing together at Christmas, Easter and on other occasions (including a BBC broadcast).

Norwich

As at Gloucester, the Cathedral Choir (of boys and men) sings the majority of the services—two on Sundays and then Monday, Wednesday and Friday evenings. On Thursday evenings, the boys and men or the men alone take it in turns to sing Evensong. The Cathedral Girls’ Choir sings on Tuesday evenings and is joined on alternate weeks by the gentlemen of the Cathedral Choir. The boys and girls do not usually sing together.

Sheffield

This one is complicated and will almost certainly need reading more than once! The boys, girls and men in various combinations sing six services each week—two on Sundays and then on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday evenings. The boys and men sing approximately $\frac{2}{3}$ of the Sunday services. The girls and men sing around $\frac{1}{4}$. The remaining Sunday services are sung by either the men alone or by everyone together (boys, girls and men). The men usually sing on Tuesday evenings. Three-quarters of the Wednesday Evensongs are sung by the girls alone, with the remaining $\frac{1}{4}$ being sung by the boys alone. Two-thirds of the Thursday evening services are sung by the girls and men, with the remaining $\frac{1}{3}$ being sung by the boys and men. Three-quarters of the Friday Evensongs are sung by the boys and men with the remaining $\frac{1}{4}$ being sung by the men only.

Southwark

The Cathedral Choirs usually sing 15 services each fortnight. The Cathedral Choir (of boys and men) sings two services on Sundays, and Evensong on Tuesdays and on alternate Fridays. On the other Fridays, the choir sing Evensong alone. The Cathedral Girls’ Choir sings Evensong on Thursdays and alternate Mondays, usually without the men. The choirs rarely sing together.

Wells

This is the only cathedral included here at which Evensong is sung daily. On Mondays and Thursdays it is usually the boys and men, whilst on Tuesdays it is usually the girls and men. On Wednesdays, it is the men alone (or, quite often, a visiting choir), whilst Fridays are split between the girls and boys (without the men). Around $\frac{1}{2}$ of the Saturday Evensongs are sung by the boys and men, a further $\frac{1}{4}$ are sung by the boys alone and the remaining $\frac{1}{4}$ sung by the girls alone. Sunday morning services are split between the boys and girls (both with the men), whilst Sunday evening services are usually sung by the boys and men. The choirs occasionally sing together.

Winchester

Very much like Gloucester and Norwich, the girls at Winchester usually sing one service (with the

men) each week, but here it is usually on Sunday, alternating between Mattins and Evensong. The men usually sing alone on Mon-

day evenings, whilst the boys and men cover the remaining six services—Tuesday, Friday and Saturday evenings, and the Eucharist with either Evensong or Mattins on Sundays. The choirs occasionally sing together.

York

There are eight sung services each week at York—three on Sundays and daily Evensong from Tuesday to Saturday each week. The boys usually sing with the men on Tuesdays and Thursdays, whilst on Wednesdays, the girls usually sing with the men. At weekends, the services are shared almost equally. One week, the boys and men do Friday Evensong and the two Sunday morning services, whilst the girls and men sing the Saturday and Sunday evening services. The next week, the two groups swap round. There are infrequent men-only services, and the two choirs also sing together occasionally.

At the beginning of this article, the writer noted that the reasons for his undertaking the research which had led to the production of the article were no longer clear to him. He is, therefore, pleased to be able to share the results with a wider (and interested) audience. Reaction to the information made available will inevitably be mixed. Some readers will be alarmed to see the extent to which girls' choirs have taken over in some cathedrals, whilst others will be relieved to see the extent to which they have not taken over in other places. Hopefully, given the intended readership of the bulletin, no one will be angered by seeing this data made available.

There is one final point to be made. This survey covers nine of England's 42 Anglican cathedrals. Fifteen of the remaining 33 cathedrals are known not to have a girls' choir. The majority of the rest are known to have a girls' choir which sings one or two services each week, either with or without the men of the main choir. Very few other cathedrals follow the Salisbury pattern of sharing the services (almost) equally between two choirs. It is to be hoped the reader now feels a little more aware of what is going on.

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