

**Provide a Dissertation Proposal including purpose, methodology,  
possible conclusions and a bibliographic justification of the  
topic based on a Literature Search**

I have had the privilege of being part of Lichfield Cathedral Choir in various guises since 1985. Being part of a tradition that has continued unbroken for at least seven hundred and fifty years makes one wonder how similar one's experiences are to those who have stood in the same stalls doing the same job through the past centuries. It was this, and my passion for Cathedral music, that led me to start tracing the personnel of the choral foundation back in 2000 using source documents in the Cathedral library.

In my previous research I had (to date) identified members of the choral foundation from approximately the start of the nineteenth century to the present day and it was therefore an area of the Cathedral's archives with which I was familiar. Combining this with the knowledge that nineteenth century England was a time of significant change within the country it seemed to be a logical area of study. Indeed, on the subject of change, there were three principal inquiries into the established church by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners during the century and each resulted in recommendations and legislation to improve "the efficiency the Establish Church, especially by making better provision for the Cure of Souls" (Ecclesiastical Commission 1854:§1 page 2)

The Commissioners' findings covered every aspect of ecclesiastical life, and it is therefore important to focus on those which affected the choral foundation and cathedral music. Although it is the intention that Lichfield will be the primary focus it seems unavoidable that the eight other English Old Foundation cathedrals (Chichester, Exeter, Hereford, Lincoln, London (St Paul's), Salisbury, Wells, York) should be considered to see the impact of the reforms upon them.

To provide an historical context for the study it is necessary to consider the state of England's Established Church at the start of the nineteenth century and the inherent need for reform. From here, the three principal surveys and their subsequent recommendations in relation to the choral foundation at the Old

Foundation cathedrals need to be examined. Against this it will then be possible to look at the effects of the recommendations on Lichfield Cathedral's choral foundation and in particular *The Corporation of the Subchanter and Vicars Choral of Lichfield Cathedral*. Intrinsicly linked to the state of the cathedrals throughout the century is the practice and form of cathedral music used in divine worship and this will be considered at Lichfield and other Old Foundation cathedrals.

### **Purpose/Aim**

The overriding concern of this study is to examine the effect of reform on the choral foundation at Lichfield during the nineteenth century within an appropriate historical context. To do this successfully there are four questions that will be addressed, *viz.*:

- i) Why there was the need for the reform of the English Established Church in the nineteenth century
- ii) What the Ecclesiastical Commissioners' reforms meant for the English Old Foundation cathedrals and their corporations of Minor Canons, Vicars Choral and Lay Clerks (these three terms have very similar meanings but their use varies from cathedral to cathedral)
- iii) How Lichfield's choral foundation and *The Corporation of the Subchanter and Vicars Choral of Lichfield Cathedral* was affected by the reforms
- iv) What the state of cathedral music at English cathedrals, with particular reference to Lichfield, was during the nineteenth century and whether it was effected by the reforms

### **Methodology**

#### ***How are you going to go about answering your questions?***

To answer these questions it will be essential to establish a historical backdrop in which to work. This will be achieved through the use of secondary sources and critical commentaries of the period. From this it will then be possible to consider the specific changes and their effects at Lichfield using primary source documents held in the Cathedral library.

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***What resources and why?***

The majority of the secondary sources dealing with cathedral music were written during the mid-twentieth century and although they contain more information on the Established Church in general, they do provide a historical setting for the research. His Majesty's Stationery Office published the Ecclesiastical Commission's reports during the nineteenth century and copies of these are available in the Cathedral library. Along with the Commission's findings and recommendations the responses from relevant people in authority at each cathedral are published. These are in the form of answers to specific questions, proposals for improvements within their own cathedral, and, in some cases, tirades and diatribes on the current state of affairs within the Established Church.

In answering the questions concerned directly with Lichfield, the Cathedral's Chapter Act books are important as they are the contemporary records of administrative life in the Cathedral containing the resolutions made at the hebdomadal Chapter meetings. The Act books also contain records of people's admissions into the foundation and these entries have formed the base of my previous research, but are still relevant in providing a picture of the number of people filling positions within the foundation and the Corporation.

**Literature Search**

***What research and information have you found in your topic area? How might it be useful? How does it relate to your research question?***

Having performed a literature search at Birmingham University there are no theses concerned with the Ecclesiastical Commission or their reforms. I am currently still waiting for responses to requests for any information on this topic from the libraries of the Old Foundation cathedrals.

Through a colleague at Lichfield Cathedral, I have been directed to an unpublished MMus thesis concerned with the music of St Paul's Cathedral 1872 – 1972 which provides an insight into musical life

there towards the end of the century. Although not directly related to Lichfield, as an Old Foundation cathedral, St Paul's was subject to many of the same problems and changes.

### ***What are the key texts?***

The key historical texts are Owen Chadwick's *The Victorian Church 1829 – 1901* (two volumes), and Philip Barrett's *Barchester: English Cathedral Life in the Nineteenth Century*. The important texts from the Cathedral library are the Chapter Act books covering the nineteenth century, and the Ecclesiastical Commission's reports from 1835, 1854, and 1882. The Cathedral's statutes may also prove insightful into changes during the latter part of the century, as rewriting Cathedral statutes was a focus of the later reforms.

### ***Which areas are covered/less well covered by the literature?***

Church history of the period is well documented, especially with reference to the metropolitan cathedral and archbishopric of York. However as a provincial cathedral, Lichfield's history is less well covered. While there are several 'guidebook-like' texts, there appears to be a lack of detailed analysis, either contemporary or subsequent, of the Commission's reforms, and it seems only possible to draw out the implications from the primary documents.

### **Bibliographic justification**

Having searched the archives and consulted the librarian at Lichfield Cathedral it transpires that there has been minimal investigation into the history of *The Corporation of the Subchanter and Vicars Choral of Lichfield Cathedral*; indeed, this was also part of the reason I started my research into the personnel several years ago. Despite the former size of the Lichfield diocese (in the nineteenth century it also included what are now the Birmingham and Coventry dioceses) little critical commentary about the diocese's principal church appears to exist. It is for this reason that I hope this study could hopefully provide a useful resource for any future research into the cathedral and choral foundation's history.

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**Possible conclusions**

At this stage of the research there are indications of some of the possible conclusions of the study. Unquestionably, as Trollope's *Barchester Chronicles* indicate, cathedral life changed in the nineteenth century: the introduction to the Ecclesiastical Commission's 1854 investigation acknowledges that their 1832 report changed things dramatically, describing the cathedrals' "gradual transition from their ancient state to another, modified by recent legislative enactments" (Ecclesiastical Commission 1854:§1 page i).

The 1854 report recommended that corporations, such as that of the Subchanter and Vicars Choral, were abolished as separate entities which would inevitably have a social impact on the life of their members, and dramatically change the dynamic of the Cathedral's staff as a previously autonomous body fell under the control of the Dean and Chapter.

The century's reforms improved the funding and facilities for English cathedrals, but there are arguments expounded by some of those in authority in cathedrals today that we are still suffering the effects of the reforms over a century ago. The reforms appear to have had little effect on the use and standard of the music within divine worship, which seems to have remained in a fairly poor state until the end of the century and start of the twentieth century.

Under the auspices of the choral foundation and the Corporation of Vicars Choral the potential for future research is boundless. In time, I certainly hope to be able to continue my work tracing the former members of the corporation through the Chapter Act books. Before their abolition the Corporation was a powerful land owning-body in Lichfield and the environs and there is a wealth of recently catalogued material available for study in the county archives.

**Timescale**

I would hope to have written the portions on the Ecclesiastical Commission before Christmas 2004 during which time I will continue my reading, and transcription where necessary, of the primary documents. I

aim to start writing about the effects on Lichfield during the first quarter of 2005 which allows three months leeway to cover any unforeseen contingencies and ensure the timely completion of the study.

(1574 words)

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