

HERITAGE CIRCLE

David Berwick, Nuggets of History – secrets of Norwich Cathedral

David Berwick delivered an interesting talk entitled *Nuggets of History* to the July meeting of the Heritage Circle at Rickinghall Village Hall. He used his ten years of experience as a Cathedral guide to explore the secrets of different parts of the building.

David began with the 100 ft. spire which has been climbed on at least two occasions, in 1798 by a 14 year old boy and in 1997 by a maverick climber. Both climbers caused consternation among the people watching but thankfully neither came to any harm. However, it is fortunate that the spire still exists as it nearly collapsed in 1963 as it began to rock when workmen were replacing the internal wooden frame which had rotted. Scaffolding was put up hastily and the repairs were completed successfully. The external architecture of the cathedral has also aided the development of medical science. In 1925 G K McKee, a Norwich orthopaedic surgeon, contributed to the idea of hip replacement joints after observing the flying buttresses which support the weight of the roof.

The cloister has two unusual features. Most windows date from the 14th Century and are carved from stone. However, two were later replaced by wood, probably in the 19th Century, but they have been constructed cleverly to blend in with the original windows. There are also indentations at the base of the pillars around the cloister. These were a mystery until it was realised that mischievous novice monks made these marks when playing 'fox and hounds,' where they chased each other around the sill of the cloister.

Inside the nave of the church there are some notable features. The Lierne vaulting is unique as it tells the story of the Bible in 255 stone effigies. These often contain anachronisms as, for example, the Pharaoh in the story of Moses crossing of the Red Sea looks and dresses like Edward IV but they offer an insight into medieval life. Similarly, one side of the cathedral is five inches higher than the other and so the windows at the rear of the nave are not totally symmetrical.

The organ had to be reconstructed between 1942 and 1950, following a serious fire in 1938 when its electrics caught fire. It now has 6,655 pipes. 4,000 are accommodated inside the body of the organ but over 2,500 are secreted on the upper gallery where they contribute to the richness of its sound.

One of the most tranquil areas of the cathedral is the Bauchon Chapel and yet it was the scene of a sensational court hearing in 1932 when Harold Davidson, Vicar of Stiffkey was defrocked for immorality. Davidson worked with prostitutes in London, trying to save girls from vice. His parishioners thought that this was leading him to neglect his parish duties. They complained to the bishop who instituted disciplinary procedures. One of the most damning pieces of evidence was a photograph of him with a naked young girl. His eccentric behaviour led to his downfall. In 1937 Davidson became a lion tamer but died after being mauled!

The talk concluded with a detailed description of the burial of Edith Cavell at the cathedral. Edith Cavell was a nurse who was executed in 1915 for helping Allied soldiers escape from German-occupied Belgium. She was viewed as a national heroine in Britain. In 1919 her body was exhumed and repatriated. There was a service in Westminster Abbey before a train brought her coffin to Norwich. She was carried through the streets of Norwich before her interment in the grounds of the cathedral. In 2017 her headstone was renewed and the area around her grave was improved.

The next meeting of the Heritage Circle will be at 7.30pm on 23 August when Georgette Vale will give a talk about Elizabeth Fry. Further information about the Heritage Circle is available on its website, www.heritagecircle.onesuffolk.net.

Gerry Gurhy