

# Norwich Cathedral

Friday afternoon, 24 July

One's first impression of this remarkable building is one of unity. Construction began in 1096 and was completed by 1146. It is thought that the stone, which was shipped from northern France, was shaped before shipment to save weight, which suggests that the design was French. Thus the building is primarily romanesque, although it has a stone spire and nave roof which replaced timber after a disastrous fire in 1463. Much of the carving in the choir dates from that time. It is extraordinarily rich and detailed and was one of the features that members came to study.

The misericords, along with the choir stalls, date from the 15th century. They are unusual in that most of the carvings represent not scriptural themes but scenes from everyday life. Deeply undercut and full of vigour and humour, they display all the joys and sorrows of medieval life. Our only regret was that they are all currently roped

Romayne panels in the clergy vestry, Norwich Cathedral



off and invisible unless one is lucky enough, as we were, to have a guided tour.

We had hoped to be able to view a 14th-15th century chest with some interesting ironwork. Unfortunately it is housed in one of the upper galleries that we were told was unsafe for visitors: health and safety strikes again! However we were shown an interesting late 16th century Italian chest. Dated by members to about 1590, and said to be typical of the genre, chests such as this were made in many sizes for storage purposes and were not specifically ecclesiastical. Made of cedar wood and decorated with penwork, it displayed religious themes, including a crucifixion scene on the inside of the lid, with secular decoration on the exterior.

The end wall of the clergy vestry is clad with panelling said to have come from St Benet's Abbey, perhaps as part of a deal done with the then prior. Attributed by members to the second half of the 16th century and thought possibly to be Flemish, it reflected the style of renaissance Italy a century earlier and was carved with romayne heads and parchemin decoration.

*Ann and Anthony Bartleet*