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Music in pre-Reformation York: a new source and some thoughts on the York Masses

LISA COLTON*

ABSTRACT Ever since Hugh Baillie and Philippe Oboussier's pioneering study of York, Borthwick Institute MS Mus 1, better known as the York Masses, it has been generally accepted that its compositions, if not the choirbook itself, originated elsewhere than York. Two locations claimed primacy in their bid for the manuscript's original provenance, Lincoln and London, owing to the internal evidence of two composers named in the manuscript, 'Johannes Cuke' and 'Horwod'. The evidence is reassessed here with regard to an important new source relating to polyphonic music and other fragments of music preserved in post-Reformation York bindings. It is suggested that these fragments originated at one or more churches in York in the late fifteenth century, and that they were finally sold for binding material c. 1583, resulting in their appearance in the same series of court books for York Minster. The cultural background for the genesis and performance of polyphonic music is then addressed, with reference to York and other northern locations such as Durham, Beverley and Selby.¹

The musical traditions of London and of the larger monastic establishments during the Middle Ages and early Renaissance have long been recognized and their place in the transmission and cultivation of written vocal polyphony has been explored in detail on many occasions.² Outside of this, it is only relatively recently that attention has been drawn to the various smaller foundations that have been linked with the cultivation of polyphonic music from at least the end of the fourteenth century.³ Of the larger urban centres outside of London, the

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¹ I am grateful to Margaret Bent and Magnus Williamson for reading earlier versions of this paper, and to the staff of the Borthwick Institute for their help and advice. Documents in the custody of the Borthwick Institute are reproduced with permission.

² See especially Margaret Bent, 'The Transmission of English Music 1300–1500: Some Aspects of Repertory and Presentation', in *Studien zur Tradition in der Musik: Kurt von Fischer zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Hans Heirrich Eggebrecht and Max Lütolf (Munich, 1973), 65–83; Peter M. Lefferts and Margaret Bent comp., 'New Sources of English Thirteenth- and Fourteenth-Century Polyphony', *Early Music History*, 2 (1982), 273–362.

³ Andrew Wathey, 'Lost Books of Polyphony in England: A List to 1500', *Royal Musical Association Research Chronicle*, 21 (1988), 1–19; Fiona Kisby: 'Books in London Parish Churches, 1400–1603', *Proceedings of the 1999 Harlaxton Symposium, Harlaxton Medieval Studies*, 11 (Stamford, 2001); Magnus Williamson, ed., 'Lost Sources of Liturgical Polyphony in England, 1500–1550' (forthcoming).

cities with secular cathedrals have been somewhat overshadowed by their monastic counterparts.⁴ York has perhaps suffered most, since of the available manuscript evidence of polyphonic singing, the manuscripts surviving in York have been presumed to originate elsewhere.⁵ The idea that York contributed anything of significance to the repertory has been tacitly rejected through lack of direct evidence of named composers or of manuscripts of polyphony, particularly in the period immediately preceding the Reformation. Recent scholarship in the field of parochial history has begun to enrich the picture of musical life of institutions hitherto neglected by some musicologists.⁶ Studies of the records of local fraternities, as well as churchwardens' accounts and other miscellaneous documents, have revealed important details relating to the purchase of liturgical books, the copying of music and the employment of singers for specific feasts and occasions.⁷ These publications are of especial value to the study of a place such as York, where evidence relating to the top-class establishments (York Minster, St Mary's Abbey, St Leonard's Hospital) is exiguous, but from where there is a substantial amount of complementary evidence from more humble institutions in the form of chantry records, wills and so forth. The churchwardens' accounts of St Michael's, Spurriergate, start at the beginning of the sixteenth century; as the only set of such records from the north of England to have survived intact, their value is substantial. On evidence such as this, David Griffiths and John Paynter have stated that polyphonic music was first sung in York towards the end of the fifteenth century.⁸ Richard Rastall's research into the York

⁴ For Lincoln see Margaret Bent and Roger Bowers, 'The Saxilby Fragment', *Early Music History*, 1 (1981), 1–27; Roger Bowers, 'Music and Worship to 1640', in *A History of Lincoln Minster*, ed. Dorothy Owen (Cambridge, 1994), 47–76. For Exeter see Brian Trowell, 'A Fourteenth-Century Ceremonial Motet and Its Composer', *Acta Musicologica*, 29 (1957), 65–75; Trowell's conclusions are discussed in Margaret Bent, 'Transmission', 70–2; and Roger Bowers, 'Fixed Points in the Chronology of English Fourteenth Century Polyphony', *Music and Letters*, 71 (1990), 313–15. For Louth, see Magnus Williamson, 'The Role of Religious Guilds in the Cultivation of Ritual Polyphony: The Case of Louth, 1450–1550', in *Music and Musicians in Renaissance Cities and Towns*, ed. Fiona Kisby (Cambridge, 2001), 82–93.

⁵ Hugh Baillie and Philippe Oboussier, 'The York Masses', *Music and Letters*, 35 (1954), 24, considered that music in Cambridge, Magdalen College, Pepys MS 1236 'was certainly composed for the Use of York'. However, this was based on an earlier, inaccurate, study of the manuscript; see Frank Ll. Harrison, 'Faburden in Practice', *Musica Disciplina*, 16 (1962), 63, n. 17. David Griffiths, 'A Musical Place of the First Quality: A History of Institutional Music Making in York c.1500–1990' (York Settlement Trust, n.d.); R. B. Dobson, 'The Founding of Perpetual Chantries by the Citizens of Medieval York', *Studies in Church History 4 The Province of York* (1967), 22–38; Frederick Harrison, *Life in a Medieval College: The Story of the Vicars-Choral of York Minster* (London, 1952); Peter Aston, *The Music of York Minster* (London, 1972).

⁶ Clive Burgess and Andrew Wathey, 'Mapping the Soundscape: Church Music in English Towns, 1450–1500', *Early Music History*, 19 (2000), 1–46; Fiona Kisby, ed., *Music and Musicians*.

⁷ R. B. Dobson, *Church and Society in the Medieval North of England* (London, 1996); Magnus Williamson, 'Royal Image-Making and Textual Interplay in Gilbert Banester's *O Maria et Elizabeth*', *Early Music History*, 19 (2000), 237–78.

⁸ David Griffiths and John Paynter, 'York', *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd Edition (London, 2001), 29 vols. (hereafter TNB), 27:665.

cycle of Mystery Plays has revealed three polyphonic settings of texts in honour of the Virgin Mary, which have been dated to the 1440s.⁹

The York Masses have long been York's best-known resident collection of late medieval vocal polyphony, yet they remain peripheral in many discussions of pre-Reformation music. The reasons for this are in some ways straightforward. Since the description of the York Masses in 1954 by Baillie and Oboussier, there has been no published edition of any of the seventeen movements;¹⁰ as such the examination of the music's detail and style has been restricted to those prepared to track down unpublished editions or make their own.¹¹ Though several of the movements, all settings of parts of the Ordinary of the Mass, are complete or have the potential to be completed, many are in various fragmentary states due to the *cantus collateralis* layout and the loss of at least as many leaves as have been preserved.¹² Furthermore, though Masses I and II are probably complete as Gloria–Credo pairs, there is no full Mass Ordinary cycle amongst the fragments.¹³ Perhaps, also, the York Masses have suffered from the provincial provenance and modest decoration of the leaves in comparison with sources such as the Lambeth, Gonville and Caius, and Eton Choirbooks from approximately the same period.¹⁴

⁹ Richard Rastall, 'York Plays', *TNG27*: 667; this refers to Play 45, the Weavers' pageant for the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

¹⁰ Baillie and Oboussier, 'The York Masses', 19–30. The Masses have been discussed in very few publications since; notable exceptions are Frank Ll. Harrison, *Music in Medieval Britain* (London, 1958), 261–2, 276–7; Hugh Benham, *Latin Church Music in England c. 1460–1575* (London, 1977), (111–3); Roger Bray, *Music in Sixteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1995), 56–7.

¹¹ Baillie made editions of the 'puzzle' Kyrie, and Masses I 'Or me veult' and II 'Custodi nos domine', both Gloria–Credo pairs. The opening of the Gloria of Mass II was recorded for the HMV *History of Music in Sound*. Two further studies were made of the York Masses in 1974: John D. Dover, 'A Transcription and Historical Study of the York Masses', M.Mus. dissertation, Kings College, London (1974); Robert Lee, of York University, transcribed selected movements, and I am grateful to John Bryan for lending me his copy of Lee's transcription.

¹² Baillie and Oboussier estimated that the original choirbook contained no fewer than ninety-two leaves, 'The York Masses', 21. Dover was more cautious, suggesting that the twenty-two surviving leaves represent no more than half of the original number, 'A Transcription and Historical Study', ii.

¹³ To my knowledge, it has not been previously recognized that Mass II shares its *cantus firmus* with the extant movements of the fragmentary Mass IV, which likewise makes reference to the rhythmicized melody given on f. 8v of the manuscript labelled *Custodi nos domine*; it also uses a similar head-motif. The origin of this version of the Purification melody is unknown. However, Mass II and Mass IV are scored for different vocal groupings (approximately SATB and ATTB respectively) and it is more likely that their relationship is limited to the fact that they were each composed on the same square. Bray, *Music in Sixteenth-Century England*, 57, states that 'at the end of the surviving portion of the manuscript is an *Or me veult* Kyrie square', but this is an error, presumably mistaking the *cantus firmus* of Mass II for that of Mass I.

¹⁴ Geoffrey Chew, 'The Provenance and Date of the Caius and Lambeth Choirbooks', *Music and Letters*, 51 (1970), 107–17; Paul Fugler, 'The Lambeth and Caius Choirbooks', *Journal of the Plainsong and Medieval Music Society*, 6 (1983), 15–25; David Skinner, 'Discovering the Provenance of the Caius and Lambeth Choirbooks', *Early Music*, 25 (1997), 245–66; Magnus Williamson, 'The Early Tudor Court, The Provinces and the Eton Choirbook', *Early Music*, 25 (1997), 229–43.

The provenance of the York Masses has been ascribed to London, or possibly Lincoln, because of the suggested identity of its two named composers: 'Horwod', assumed to be the William Horwood (*d.* 1484)¹⁵ known from the Eton Choirbook, and 'Johannes Cuke', perhaps the 'Johannes Koke' (*d.* 1507) mentioned as a Master of the Fraternity of St Nicholas in London.¹⁶ Given the prevalence of the name John Cook across England, and the lack of any further music attributed to him, the question of Cuke's identity must remain open. Despite the fact that Horwood was later Master of the choristers and organist at Lincoln Minster,¹⁷ London has remained the favoured provenance of the York leaves.¹⁸

The basic conclusions of scholars relating to the York Masses have been conservative and sometimes contradictory. The compositions themselves have been ascribed to dates ranging from *c.* 1470 (Kyrie I) to the late 1520s (Mass VI); likewise, the date of the compilation of the choirbook has been placed between *c.* 1495 and the 1520s.¹⁹ The grounds for these opinions have included the comparison of scribal and musical styles associated with music collections primarily from the London area, and the Eton Choirbook, with those evident in the York Masses. The validity of such an approach in relation to this quite different source has yet to be challenged.

The appearance of Sarum chants as plainsongs in the York Masses has been taken as evidence against their use within the York Diocese. The York Use was distinct from that of Sarum in several ways, not least through the prevalence of sequences in the liturgy preserved from St Mary's Abbey in York.²⁰ The York Gradual has been accepted as reflecting the practice of the diocese of York up to the Reformation.²¹ However, it is clear that in many cases, institutions such

¹⁵ Horwood is recorded in the Fraternity register as having died in 1484; Dover, 'A Transcription and Historical Study', 19.

¹⁶ The membership register of the Fraternity of St Nicholas, London, Guildhall Library, 4889, includes references to Horwood in 1459, 1462 and 1474. 'Johannes Koke' was a clerk of St Olave, Silver Street in 1501; Hugh Baillie, 'Some Biographical Notes on English Church Musicians, Chiefly Working in London (1485–1569)', *Royal Musical Association Research Chronicle*, 2 (1962), 30.

¹⁷ Bent, 'The Saxilby Fragment', 21.

¹⁸ Baillie and Oboussier, 'The York Masses', 24; Bray, *Music in Sixteenth-Century England*, 56.

¹⁹ Baillie and Oboussier, 'The York Masses', 25, give the period *c.* 1490–*c.* 1520. Dover, 'A Transcription and Historical Study', 16, suggests that the choirbook was completed between *c.* 1470 and *c.* 1495. His examination of the watermarks showed there to be two paper types, identifiable as Briquet, nos. 3698 (Genoa, 1459) and 9197 (Lübeck, 1490), and supported the arrangement of leaves as suggested by Baillie and Oboussier, 'The York Masses', 22–3. Charles Moïse Briquet, *Les Filigranes*, 4 vols. (Geneva, 1907). A comparable source from late fifteenth-century England, London, British Library, MS Add. 54324, containing watermarks from the mid-1460s, is considered to have been copied *c.* 1475; see Margaret Bent and Ian Bent, 'Dufay, Dunstable, Plummer – A New Source', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 22 (1969), 394–424, especially pp. 394–6.

²⁰ See Peter Lefferts, 'Cantilena and Antiphon: Music for Marian Services in Late Medieval England', in *Studies in Medieval Music: Festschrift for Ernest Sanders*, *Current Musicology*, 47 (1990), 247–82; Walter Howard Frere, 'The Connection Between English and Norman Rites', *Journal of Theological Studies*, 4 (1903), 32–40.

²¹ The fifteenth-century York Gradual, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Lat. liturg. b. 5. See Walter Howard Frere, 'The Newly Found York Gradual', *Journal of Theological Studies*, 2 (1901), 23–7.

as York and Durham, though following their own separate rite, employed music from institutions and locations following that of Sarum. Towards the end of the pre-Reformation period, many attempts were made to bring local uses into line with Salisbury.²² York service books increasingly reflected this trend. From 1503, several printed editions of the Psalter and Hymnal were produced for both York and Sarum Use establishments.²³ Other institutions appear to have owned books for more than one use; for example, Durham Cathedral, which followed its own rite, is known to have ordered polyphonic books to be made in Westminster. This practice of copying for establishments elsewhere in the country may well have affected the overall prevalence of Sarum chants in polyphonic items, finding their way into the music practices of establishments with their own peculiar rite. Overall, the picture of local chant usage is far muddier than might previously have been thought, and the possibility that York may have been home to polyphonic items which were based upon Sarum chants in this period cannot be ruled out.

Recently, some fragments of music have come to light that paint a new picture of music-making in the northern capital. Now shelved as York, Borthwick Institute, MS Mus 9, these fragments appear to be from a collection of Gloria squares. The assimilation of evidence relating to sources of both polyphony and plainchant in sixteenth-century books has led to the re-examination of the whole pattern of York's musical remains. There are several sources that are central to the understanding of this new evidence, all of which appear as binding fragments for non-musical sources now kept at the Borthwick Institute of Historical Research in York.²⁴ These are listed below.

1. MS Mus. 1, the York Masses. Host source: Consistory Court Acts, AB 24–5 (1562/3–1563/4).
2. MS Mus. 2b (hereafter *Ybi 2*), the *Nesciens mater* fragment concordant with Bittering's setting in the Old Hall Manuscript, and two further fragmentary pieces of music. Host source: Consistory Court Acts, AB 26 (1564/5).²⁵

²² Harrison, *Music in Medieval Britain*, 49. Kyrie II is an *alternatim* setting based on the plainchant *O Rex Clemens*. This trope text is found only in the service books of York, Hereford and Exeter; Walter Howard Frere, 'York Service Books', *York Minster Historical Tracts*, 19 (1927), reprinted in John Henry Arnold and Edward G. P. Wyatt, eds., *Walter Howard Frere: A Collection of His Papers on Liturgical and Historical Subjects*, Alcuin Club Collections 35 (London, 1940), 159–69.

²³ Frere, 'York Service Books'.

²⁴ A York Antiphonal held at Arundel Castle contains an *Asperge me* setting, preserved on flyleaves to the main volume. Andrew Hughes, 'Fifteenth-Century English Polyphony Discovered in Norwich and Arundel', *Music and Letters*, 59 (1978), 148–58. Since this is unrelated to the York bindings discussed here, it has been excluded.

²⁵ Described in Gilbert Reaney, 'Some Little-Known Sources of Medieval Polyphony In England', *Musica Disciplina*, 15 (1961), 15–26, especially p. 23. Margaret Bent described *Ybi 2* as 'probably of York provenance' in 'Sources of the Old Hall Manuscript', *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association*, 94 (1968), 19–35, cited from p. 29.

3. MS Mus. 9 (hereafter *Ybi* 9), a newly discovered source, comprising seventeen binding strips. Host source: Consistory Court Acts, AB 39 (1582/3).²⁶
4. Probate Register 17A, including part of a bifolium from a York Gradual as a front flyleaf.²⁷ The host source includes probate records from the years 1561–5.
5. Miscellaneous binding strips, unshelved and kept in a box of binding fragments. Their precise origin is unknown at present, though they were taken from books now kept at the Borthwick Institute. They comprise four fragments from two original volumes, one an Antiphonal and one a Gradual, probably of the York Use.²⁸

Most striking are three elements: the use of musical binding fragments in official records local and specific to York; the range of musical genres, including plainchant and polyphony; a repertory of previously unidentified squares, a compositional technique used in English pre-Reformation repertory, including the York Masses.²⁹ The seventeen binding strips (*Ybi* 9), used as quire guards throughout the sixteenth-century volume, are described below (Plates 1–4).

Original dimensions of each bifolium: approximately 290 mm high x 400 mm wide. Nine brown five-line staves 145 mm wide x 15 mm deep. Text and music in brown ink. Up to three scribes, responsible for items 1, 4 and 5, item 2 and item 3 respectively. Texts of items 1 and 2 in different cursive hands. Margins ruled in drypoint. Written space 145 mm wide, but height imprecise because of the missing strips. Mensuration signs visible are C, Ċ, Φ, and O; there are no Φ signs. Several blank staves.

1. *Et [in terra pax . . .] Gra[tias]* Gloria concordant with Old Hall, Gloria no. 5 (anonymous), contratenor part only. Fragmentary, but appears to provide part of the end to the incomplete version in Old Hall.³⁰ Notation is white void with black full coloration. Text restricted to cues only. Only alternate verses are given. The middle voice of Gloria no. 5 in Old Hall sets the Sarum plainsong Gloria V.
2. *Et interra [sic] pax . . .* Gloria tenor with the full text underlaid. *Alternatim*

²⁶ Digitally captured images of *Ybi* Mus. 1, 2 and 9 can be found on the DIAMM website, www.diamm.ac.uk.

²⁷ The appearance in Probate Register 17A, f. i, of the Kyrie trope *Kyrie virginitatis amator inclite pater et creator marie eleyson*, found in the York Use, which appears in the Sarum Use with the text *Fons bonitatis*, would support the theory that this was part of a York Gradual. The trope *Virginitatis amator* is also found in the Dublin Troper, Cambridge University, Add. (ms.) 710, an early fourteenth-century book from St Patrick's, Dublin.

²⁸ My numbering. Fragments 1, 2 and 3 contain antiphons for Easter and responsories, and are likely to have originated from the same volume. Fragment 4 is from a Gradual.

²⁹ Hugh Baillie, 'Squares', *Acta Musicologica*, 32 (1960), 178–93; Margaret Bent, 'Square [swarenote, sqwarenote]', *TNG* 24: 226–7. Bray gives the neat definition that a square is 'a tune from an existing work that has been written down to form the basis of a later composed work', *Music in Sixteenth-Century England*, 44.

³⁰ Andrew Hughes and Margaret Bent, eds., *The Old Hall Manuscript*, 3 vols., *Corpus Mensurabilis Musicae* 46 (American Institute of Musicology, 1973).

setting in black full coloration. The musical style suggests that, like items 1 and 3, alternate verses of a pre-existent piece from c. 1400 may have been extracted to create this tenor.

3. [*Et in terra pax*] Gloria tenor, untexted, concordant with Gloria no. 1 from the Old Hall manuscript (ending only) and *Omc* 266 (opening only).³¹ *Ybi* 9 preserves only alternate verses of the text, and adds an initial four notes to the *Omc* 266 version for the words *Et in terra*, which need not have appeared in the exemplar. Black full coloration, smaller and finer than item 2. Slight variations from the two known sources of this Gloria.
4. Several fragmentary parts of further compositions (perhaps as many as six), for which no text survives and no identifications have so far been made.³² One tenor may be a further *alternatim* setting of the Gloria, since the music is divided into sections as in items 1–3. All these fragmentary pieces are in the same hand, in void notation. Frequent changes of mensuration suggest a date current with the later rather than earlier layer of Old Hall.

The strips can be arranged into two main leaves, though it is possible that there are more leaves represented in what survives. The existence of two upper and two lower strips, preserved untrimmed and effectively the head and foot of two separate leaves, would support this preliminary hypothesis.³³ The original dimensions of the leaves appear to match the surviving portion of *Ybi* 2 precisely. Since each strip comprises a horizontal section across both sides of a bifolium, it contains music from the verso and recto of a leaf.

Unlike *Ybi* 2, which preserves three-part repertory in score format, this collection contains only the lower part of each source composition. The date of *Ybi* 9, certainly no later than c. 1500, would argue against this being a part book. It would appear that the tenors in *Ybi* 9 were all copied as squares. It is possible that most if not all these squares came from settings of the Gloria, and that some kind of *alternatim* performance was intended. In the Old Hall copies of these Glorias, all verses were set as polyphony. That pieces were purged in this specific way is intriguing, and begs the question of how the ‘missing’ sections of text were to be supplied. Were they to have been sung as plainchant, or freely composed? The *alternatim* structure of Gloria movements, while not particularly popular in England, can be found in examples from the fifteenth century, and in settings by Ludford and Sheppard in the sixteenth.³⁴ York Masses I ‘Or

³¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 1 (latter part only). The first part of this Gloria is concordant with Oxford, Magdalen College, ms 266/268; *ibid.*, vol. 3, 73. *Ybi* 9 confirms Bent’s reconstruction for bar 30.

³² This number is an estimation only.

³³ The strips bear numbers relating to the foliation of the sixteenth-century quires from which they were extracted. In the plates, the strips are arranged in the following order, from the top: (folio A) 56A, 237A, 205A, 254A, 6A, 39A, 73A, 221A, 156B; (folio B) 189B, 271A, 23B, 173B, 89B, 106A, 123B, 139B.

³⁴ Sheppard (‘a playne song masse for a mene’, British Library, Mss Add. 17802–5) and Ludford (ferial Masses, British Library, Royal Appendix 45–8); Baillie and Oboussier, ‘The York Masses’, 26.

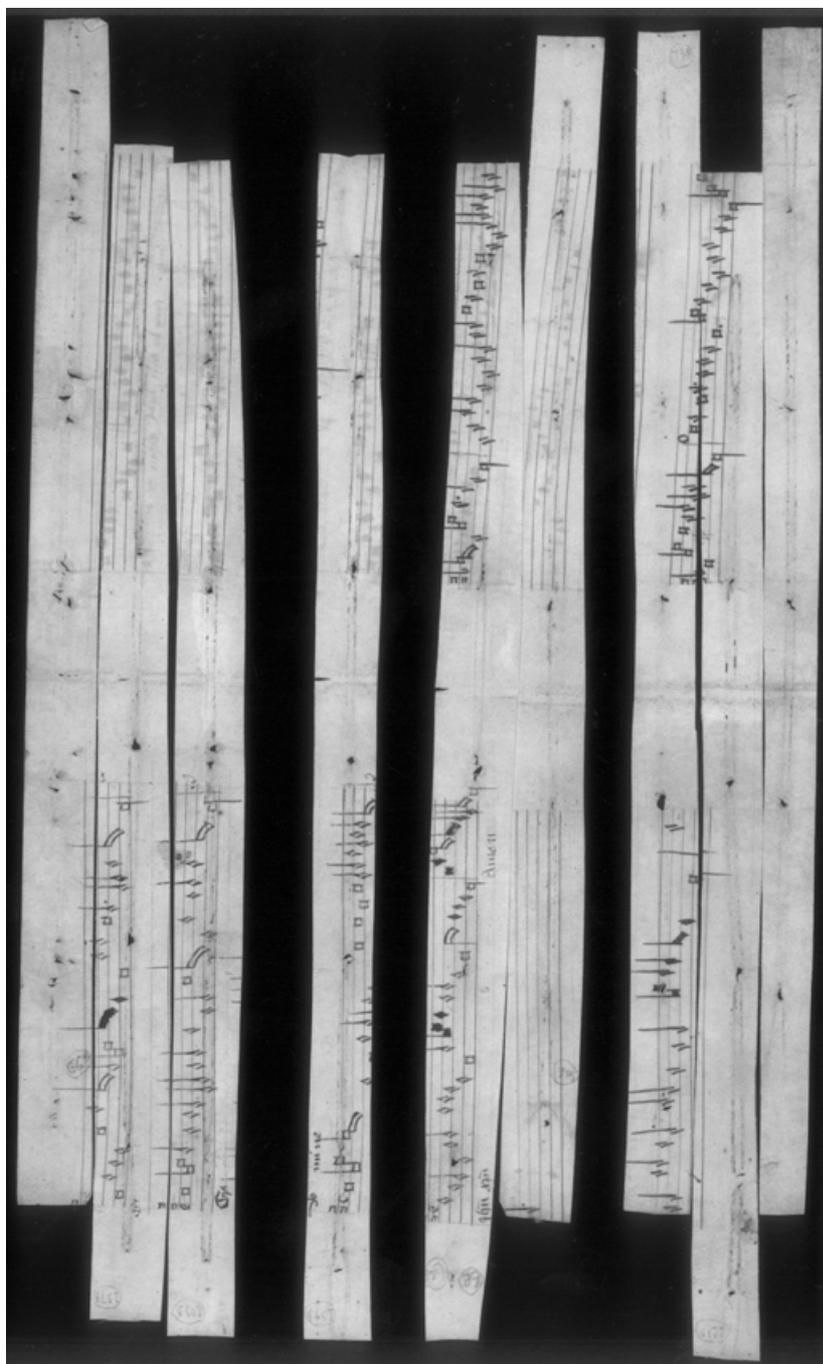


Plate 1 York, Borthwick Institute for Historical Research, MS Mus 9, f.A

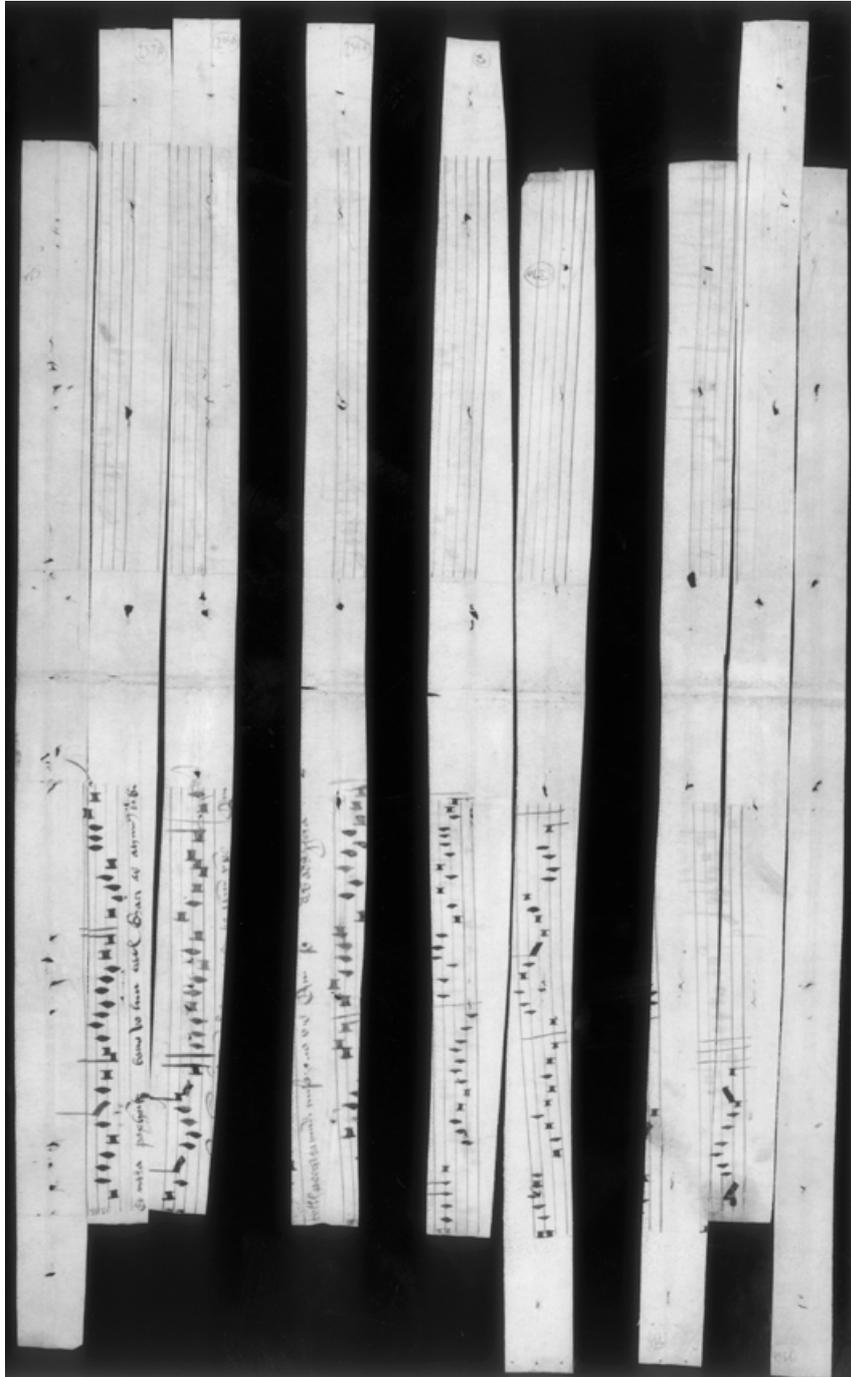


Plate 2 York, Borthwick Institute for Historical Research, MS Mus 9, f.A (verso)

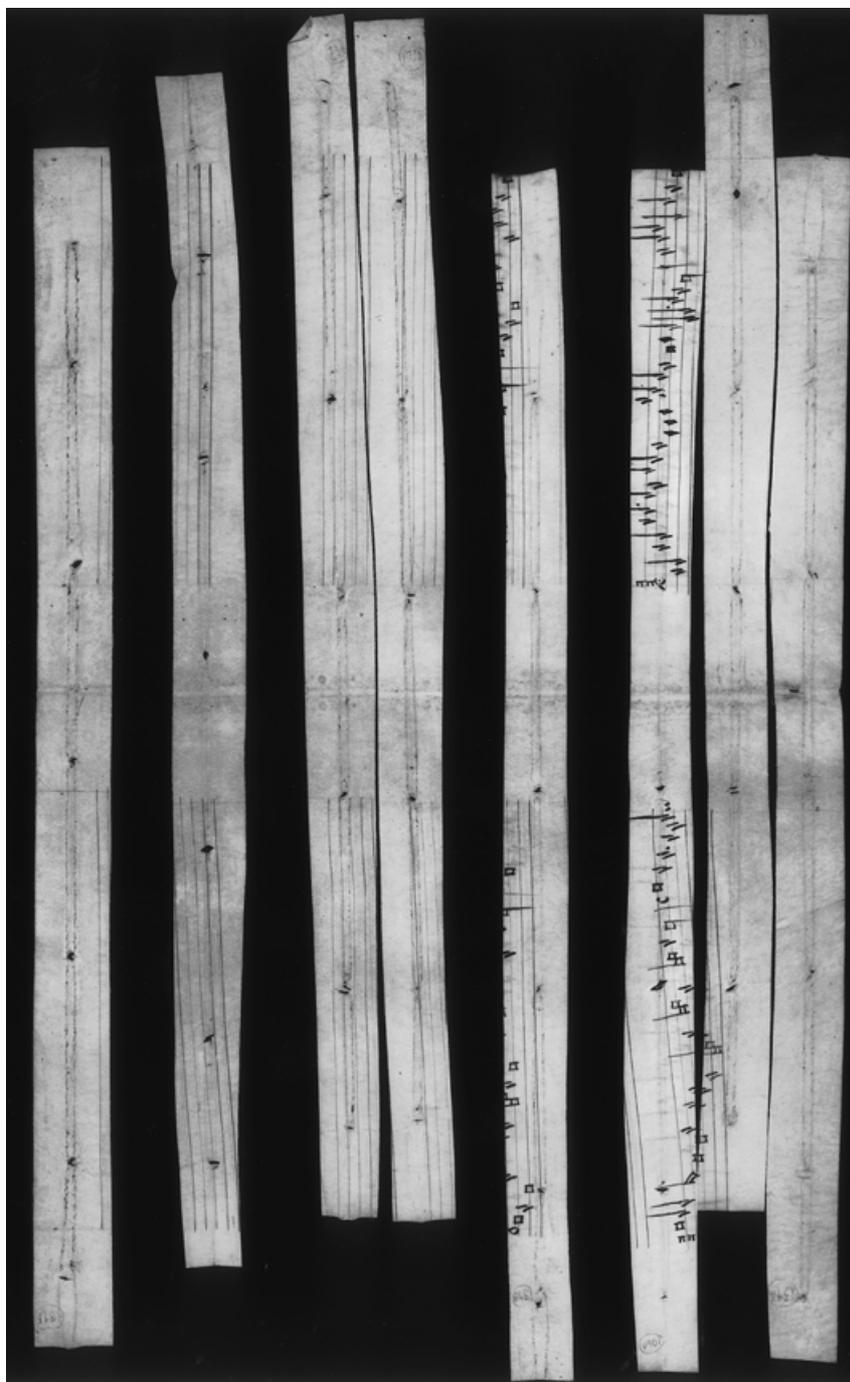


Plate 3 York, Borthwick Institute for Historical Research, MS Mus 9, f.B

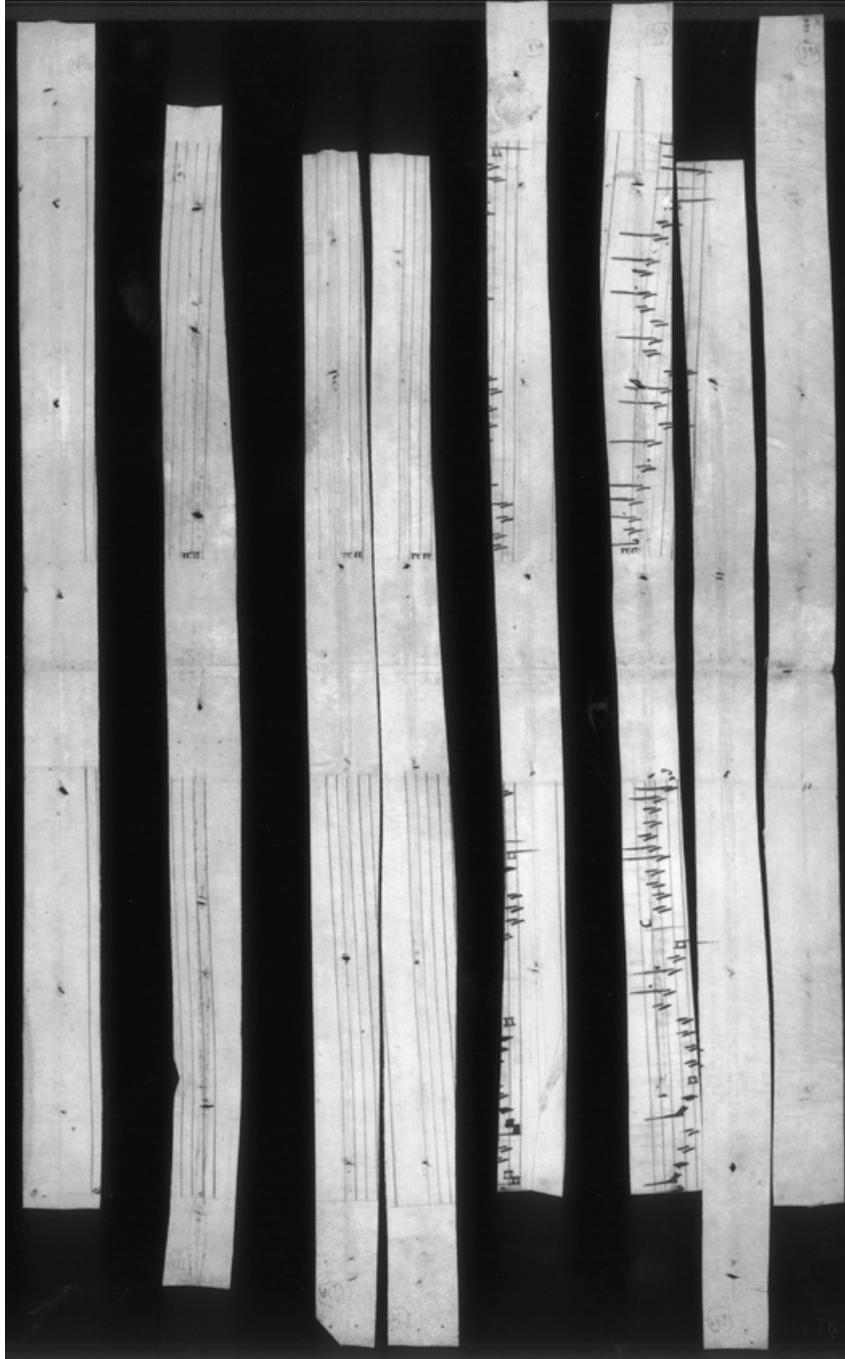


Plate 4 York, Borthwick Institute for Historical Research, MS Mus 9, f.B (verso)

me veult' and II 'Custodi nos' are *alternatim* settings based on squares.³⁵ In the past, *alternatim* settings have been thought to have been particularly associated with the celebration of Lady Masses.³⁶

The repertory concordant with the strips clearly predates the notation in *Ybi* 9. The void notation and the text hand of item 1 suggest that the majority of the squares were copied toward the middle of the fifteenth century. This is supported by the later style of notation found in items 2 and 3, which appear to have been copied no earlier than the third quarter of the fifteenth century, and perhaps even slightly later. The void notation which is most prominent in this collection of squares all appears to have been entered by the same hand, and may indicate that this was an earlier layer, later supplemented with new works. At least two of the scribes were aware of the association between *c.* 1400 repertory and the use of squares at a much later date. It is notable that the untexted Gloria (item 3) known from the opening piece in Old Hall follows the piece (item 2) whose hand is associated with the latest dating, particularly in the case of the text hand. The texts beneath items 1 and 2 may have been added in by later scribes, since they were entered roughly and inaccurately.³⁷ If this text was merely an *aide-mémoire* to the liturgical origin of the music, complete accuracy may not have been a priority.

Since the dimensions of the written space and estimated overall page size are identical with those of *Ybi* 2, and given the presence of void notation and *c.* 1400 repertory in both of these sources, one might be inclined to suggest that their origins lay in the same choirbook. Though the staff width and gauge of *Ybi* 9 match those of *Ybi* 2, the written space of the nine staves in *Ybi* 9 is centred and preserved intact; the top staff of *Ybi* 2 has been trimmed off, thus its original height would have been greater. It would seem that *Ybi* 9 was copied later than *Ybi* 2. Was the compiler aware of the earlier collection of music, from which he drew tenors for use as squares, only to trim a leaf from this collection for use as a cover for the new one? Why do the written space and ruled staves match one another so precisely? Could they conceivably have been articulated by the same hand, during the same time period? It is likely that the earlier leaf simply provided a convenient cover for the square collection, yet the concordances of both sources with repertory known from the Old Hall manuscript is intriguing.

³⁵ 'Or me veult' is a ballade ascribed to Du Fay which includes the bass found in several English Mass Ordinary and instrumental settings of a later date, including Ludford's Tuesday ferial Mass. The tenor melody is also known as K3 and 'Portugaler'. See Margaret Bent, 'The Songs of Dufay: Some Questions of Form and Authenticity', *Early Music*, 8 (1980), 454–9; John Bergsagel, 'An Introduction to Ludford', *Musica Disciplina*, 14 (1960), 105–30; John Bergsagel, 'On the Performance of Ludford's *alternatim* Masses', *Musica Disciplina*, 16 (1962), 35–55; David Skinner, 'At the mynde of Nycholas Ludford', *Early Music*, 22 (1994), 393–413.

³⁶ Bray, *Music in Sixteenth-Century England*, 54.

³⁷ Item 1 has 'Jhesu Christi' instead of 'Christe'. Item 2 has 'Et interra' for 'Et in terra'.

The *RISM* entry for *Ybi* 2 suggests that pen trials including the name *Lamkyn* may relate to a composer attribution, since lost. However, all of these names, including 'Elizabeth Hawley' and a certain 'Johannes', relate to the main contents of the host source, and are in a much later hand. Therefore it must be concluded that with the exception of the Bittering piece attributed to him only in Old Hall, the corpus of both *Ybi* 2 and *Ybi* 9 remains anonymous. Bittering contributed two known Glorias to the Old Hall manuscript, in addition to one Credo, a setting of the *Nesciens mater* and *En Katerine / Virginalis concio*; he was also associated with Credo no. 85 in Old Hall by a sixteenth-century owner of the manuscript, but this has been considered spurious.³⁸ There are no firm grounds for ascribing the anonymous Old Hall Glorias in the source *Ybi* 9 to Bittering.³⁹

The questions of where these manuscripts might have originated, and how they eventually found their way into related local bindings are particularly interesting. Their association in the bindings of the 1560s and 1583 suggests that the original music sources did not fall prey to the first waves of destruction during the Reformation. Similar cases, such as the Forrest-Heyther part books, confirm that some choirbooks were still available as late as the 1550s.⁴⁰ It is likely that with later Protestant reforms, a new wave of anti-Catholic measures resulted in the dispersal of these music books from one or more churches in the local area, resulting in their sale to a York binder, who may have been a disenfranchised monk or priest with binding skills which provided his income. Some evidence of reforming spirit can be seen in the following edict (1571) by the archbishop of York, Edmund Grindal (1570–1576):

Whether all and every antiphoner, mass-book, grailes, portesses, processions, manuals, legendaries, and all other books of late belonging to your church or chapel, which served for the superstitious Latin service, be utterly defaced, rent, and abolished, and if they be not, through whose default that is, and at whose keeping they remain.⁴¹

Grindal's edict was typical of the approach of Protestant reformers, but it cannot have had a direct effect on the music fragments under discussion here since at least one of them was used in a binding of 1583, the year of Grindal's death, and none shows evidence of having been used in previous bindings. The appearance of the music in *Ybi* 1, 2 and 9 in volumes from the same series of court books prompts the suggestion that these records were collectively rebound no earlier than 1583 using material from one or more church's or individual's music

³⁸ See Hughes and Bent, eds., *The Old Hall Manuscript*, nos. 17, 18, 79, 50 and 145 respectively. See Margaret Bent, 'Bittering', *TNG* 4: 733–4.

³⁹ None of Bittering's compositions seems to have been based on, or used as, squares in any other source. In other square collections, such as British Library, Lansdowne 462, there are composer attributions to Leonel Power and others. These identifications may have been related to the composer of the full work from which each square had been extracted.

⁴⁰ Bray, *Music in Sixteenth-Century England*, 53.

⁴¹ Walter Howard Frere, ed., *Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Period of the Reformation*, 3 volumes (Norden, 1910), 3:1559–1575.

collections. Probate Register 17A, bound no earlier than 1565, may link the York plainchant flyleaf with this picture. It also raises the possibility that the preservation of music fragments may not have been restricted to Consistory Court Act volumes, but generally to volumes of local provenance. That music may turn up in other books bound during a similar period therefore remains a possibility.

What evidence is there to suggest that polyphonic music was ever cultivated in York? With the exception of the flyleaves preserved in a York antiphonal described by Andrew Hughes, there have been no extant fragments of polyphony linked to its local choirs, whether from the Minster, St Mary's Abbey, or one of its numerous smaller churches, until after the Reformation.⁴² Yet there is evidence from a handful of parish churches that such singing took place. St Michael's, Spurriergate, was one of the wealthiest of York's churches during the Middle Ages, and held 'one of the more valuable estates in York, ranking alongside the estate of Holy Trinity Priory'.⁴³ It also shared personnel with other religious establishments, such as Harry Gelsthorp, who in 1534 was a parson at St Michael's, curate at St Mary's, Castlegate, and cantarist at the altar of St Andrew in York Minster.⁴⁴ There is record of one of its most prominent priests, Sir Thomas Wirral (or Worrall), having sung there regularly; he was an able scribe who took care of the only church accounts which still survive from the area.⁴⁵ It has been suggested Wirral's handwriting appears in the binding fragments, as the text under item 2.⁴⁶ With such a small amount of text to examine, the evidence may be considered inconclusive in this respect.

The churchwardens' accounts record several requests for polyphonic music to be sung for the memorial services, or obits, of parishioners at St Michael's. As early as 1502/3, shipman Robert Dale asked for a weekly Mass to be sung 'with pryk noote' every Friday at the Jesus altar in return for his tenement in Low Ousegate.⁴⁷ In 1519, Anthony Middleton left £4. 13s. 4d. 'to an honest priest being a choir man to sing in my parish church . . . by the space of a year'.⁴⁸ Both young and adult voices were evidently employed for such purposes, according to

⁴² The York Gradual, probably from the village of East Drayton, includes two pieces of polyphony, a three-part setting of *Veni Creator* and *Deo Gracias* on page 70; see Frere, 'The Newly-Found York Gradual', 23. Hughes, 'Fifteenth-Century Polyphony', described music fragments linked to the Chapel of St Mary and the Holy Angels in York, the collegiate chapel of York Minster, usually known as St Sepulchre's Chapel, which had a staff of prebendaries to sing Masses for the dead.

⁴³ See Chris C. Webb, *Churchwardens' Accounts of St Michael, Spurriergate, York, 1518–1548*, 2 vols. Borthwick Texts and Calendars 20 (York, 1997), 1:2.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴⁵ Webb tells us that 'Jhesu mass was sung by both priests and clerks until 1536, from when it seems to have become the responsibility of Thomas Wyrall'; see Webb, "'Toward the Salary and Fynding of the Jhesu Masse": The Obit of William of Dale, Shipman and Citizen of York, in 1503', in *The Church in Medieval York: Records Edited in Honour of Professor Barrie Dobson*, ed. David Smith, Borthwick Texts and Calendars 24 (York, 1999), 128–9.

⁴⁶ The suggestion was made privately by Chris Webb.

⁴⁷ St Michael's feoffes deeds, PR Y / MS F 86 (1502); this request also appears in PR Y / MS F 89 on 20 March 1508.

⁴⁸ Probate Register 9, f. 107.

the will of Thomas Hardsong, which specified for 'a mass of Commemoration of Our Lady the Virgin every Saturday solemnly to be sung with note of men and children and the organs', for which the priests and clerks were paid 13s. 4d. in 1513.⁴⁹ We have the names of some of the singers: such as John Baitman, who was paid 'for syngyng in the church', and 'Appylby qwerester apon Megh- elmes day'.⁵⁰ Webb states that 'the endowed obits were attended by up to five priests, the children (possibly numbering between two and four) and the under clerk'.⁵¹ The annual payment of the under clerk at St Michael's, one pair of gloves, was made in return for singing 'A Mind of Me' on the twelfth day of Christmas, perhaps also relating to a memorial of some sort.⁵²

Other churches in York have some record of polyphonic music being performed there. On 22 April 1515, Bartram Dawson, alderman of Holy Trinity, King's Court, left a tenement in Petergate to his church in return for a 'mass of Jesu every Friday to be sung with pricksong at ten of the clock', and specified that if his children died without heirs, his other tenements in Ousegate and Nessgate were to go to St Michael's, Spurriergate, where an identical Mass was to be sung on Fridays throughout the year with pricksong.⁵³ This would suggest that the choirs at St Michael's and Holy Trinity were of comparable musical capability, or perhaps that they shared personnel. Both Robert Dale and Bartram Dawson expected each church to be equipped to sing a polyphonic Jesus Mass every Friday; Thomas Hardsong expected similar forces to be available for Saturday Lady Mass. James Bagule, rector of All Saints, North Street, left one book of song, 'unum librum de cantis', and one of 'Balads' to William Hauke in 1438, as well as one book with motets, 'unum librum cum Motetes', to Thomas Astell.⁵⁴ Earlier still, records relating to York Minster include payments in 1389 and 1390 to Master John Thornor for books of polyphony.⁵⁵

The context in the north of the country for this picture of music-making can be supported by the practices of other local religious centres. Durham is one of the earliest establishments whose records name 'swarenote' amongst the list of accomplishments for choristers; the term is found in the contracts of Thomas Foderley (1496) and Thomas Ashwell (1513).⁵⁶ The rules at York Minster, drawn up in 1507, required that all vicars were taught 'how to sing priksong, faburdon and discant';⁵⁷ Thomas Kirkby, organist and master of the choristers in 1531,

⁴⁹ Will of Thomas Hardsong, Probate Register 9, f. 5. There was a song school at St Michael's from as early as 1489; Webb, 'Toward the Salary', 129.

⁵⁰ Webb, *Churchwardens' Accounts*, 5, n. 5.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵² Webb, *Churchwardens' Accounts*, 304.

⁵³ Probate Register 9, f. 39v. I am grateful to Claire Cross for this reference.

⁵⁴ Wathey, 'Lost Books', 14.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵⁶ Hugh Baillie, 'Squares', 180. Foderley's contract is Durham, Reg. Reg. V, f. 34, Ashwell's is Durham, Reg. V, f. 146.

⁵⁷ Harrison, *Life in a Medieval College*, 63.

was employed to instruct the children in 'planesong, prikesong, figuration and deschaunt' alongside his duties as organist in the choir and Lady Chapel.⁵⁸ York and Durham each purchased organs of a high calibre; for example, the records note that at the Reformation Durham had:

3 paire of organs belonginge to the said quire for maintenance of gods seruice . . . one of the fairest paire of the 3 did stand over the quire dore only opened and playd uppon at principall feastes, the pipes beinge all of most fine wood, and workmanshipp verie faire . . . there was but 2 paire more of them in all England of the same makinge, one paire in Yorke and another in Paules.⁵⁹

York Minster had an organ from as early as 1236, and payments for repairs to instruments exist from 1338.⁶⁰ We know that St Michael's, Spurriergate, owned an organ at the beginning of the sixteenth century, since it was removed in 1525, to be replaced two years later. An organ-maker from London was employed to build and repair organs for St Michael's in 1535 and 'whan so ever thay hayll owght or neydes of mendyng'; it is possible that he was also responsible for the Durham instrument mentioned above.⁶¹ Since by far the most widely travelled and successful London organ-builders and repairers of the period were the father and son by the name of John Howe, it is likely that they were the men employed by St Michael's for this job.⁶² Later in the period, a local man, William of Castlegate, was responsible for St Michael's instruments.⁶³

On 18 June 1544, an entry was made in the Durham account for expenses made to London, including one hymnal, one collection of 'playneson of fyve partes' and one set of pricksong in three, four and five parts to be copied by the chantry priest at Westminster.⁶⁴ If York purchased similar collections of music from the capital, that was not to say that it did not share its resources with other parts of the country. York had the means to copy elaborate volumes, a fact attested by the admission to the freedom of the city of Richard Flint, a chaplain, who in 1494/5 wished to be 'able to write, bind, "flourish", and sell

⁵⁸ York Minster Library, *Registers of Leases etc. 1508–1587*, Wa, ff. 50v–51.

⁵⁹ Canon Fowler, ed., *Rites of Durham . . . before the suppression. Written 1593*, Surtees Society 107 (Durham, 1903), 16, 207. The mention of York presumably applies to an organ at the Minster.

⁶⁰ Griffiths and John Paynter, 'York', *TNG* 27: 665.

⁶¹ Webb, *Churchwardens' Accounts*, 8.

⁶² Baillie, 'Some Biographical Notes', 40, states that the earliest records of this partnership date from the work on the organ of York Minster in 1485, and that they worked in locations around London, as well as in places such as Eton, Sheffield and Coventry. The younger Howe (d. 1571) continued his father's business from 1519. Other organ-builders who travelled during this period include Anthony Duddington from London, who built an organ for St Botolph's Church in Boston c. 1520; my thanks to Magnus Williamson for drawing my attention to this possible identification.

⁶³ PR Y / MS 3, f. 27, note to PR Y / MS 4, f. 143; Webb, *Churchwardens' Accounts*, 8. An analysis of the admissions to freedom for various trades from 1272 to 1509 has revealed five organ-makers for the period 1350–99, two from 1400–49, and four from 1450–1509; Peter M. Tillott, ed., *A History of Yorkshire: The City of York. Victoria History of the Counties of England* (Oxford, 1961), 116.

⁶⁴ Canon Fowler, ed., *Extracts from the Account Rolls of the Abbey of Durham from the Original MSS*, 3 vols., Surtees Society 99–100, 103 (Durham, 1898–9, 1901), 726.

books without interference from the searchers of the typewriters' guild'.⁶⁵ In 1510, Louth parish church paid one priest, William Prince, 16d. 'for songs prekyng at Yorke';⁶⁶ a second reference to him is found in 1512–13: 'Sonday sexag[esima] Willm Prynce prest prekyng a n[e]w antym *salve regina* .v. parts, v d'.⁶⁷ To what extent this was music composed in York, or simply belonged to someone there, is impossible to ascertain. It is interesting to note that in 1535/6, Louth parish church possessed 'a sqwar apon the .viii. tunes', and it may be that one of the types of music copied on such occasions was the 'raw materials' of composition, such as squares and faburdens, rather than finished settings in three or more parts.⁶⁸ Other locations in Yorkshire contain tantalizing references to polyphony. At Beverley Minster, for example, one document records that 'Johannus Merebek' copied some music in 1532/3.⁶⁹ For the Lady Chapel choir at Selby Abbey, payments were made for a Mass 'Assumpta est Maria', another piece in five parts, and for a Jesus Mass in 1536/7, the latter of which was copied on paper by a man named John Bull.⁷⁰ York's musicians were evidently part of a community of north eastern singers who shared their musical resources at this time.

It is impossible to say for certain whether the institution responsible for the copying of the music in *Ybi* 1, 2 and 9 was in York, though circumstantial evidence would suggest it. It is equally difficult to imagine which church or churches would have owned this polyphony, since such a small amount of documentation exists from the Minster and St Mary's Abbey, surely the most capable of providing the financial backing for regular choral singing. We do know, however, that some music was copied, circulated and performed in York during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. The discovery of the collection of squares, *Ybi* 9, fills out the picture of the diverse genres of composition cultivated in the city, including three-, four- and possibly five-part Lady Masses, Jesus Masses, squares and polyphonic sequences. The performance of polyphonic Friday Jesus Masses and Saturday Lady Masses as a memorial were an important service provided to the wealthiest parishioners of churches such as St Michael's, Spurriergate, and Holy Trinity, King's Square. North of the River Ouse, the church of All Saints, North Street, attracted the patronage of its mercantile elite for stained glass, and may also have owned polyphony from the middle of the

⁶⁵ R. B. Dobson, 'Admissions to the Freedom of the City of York in the Later Middle Ages', *The Economic History Review*, 2nd series 26/1 (1973), 1–21, esp. p. 15. York Civic Records, 11, 126; Freeman's Register, 218.

⁶⁶ R. C. Dudding, ed., *The First Churchwardens' Book of Louth, 1500–1524* (Oxford, 1941), 131; quoted in Burgess and Wathey, 'Mapping the Soundscape', 39. It is not clear whether Prince was a priest at York or one sent from Louth, though the former seems more likely.

⁶⁷ My thanks to Magnus Williamson for this reference.

⁶⁸ Magnus Williamson, 'The Role of Religious Guilds', 87.

⁶⁹ London, British Library, Additional Roll 27324, under *Reparaciones*.

⁷⁰ Hull, University Library, DDLO 20 / 61, account of the keeper of the choir of the Lady Chapel, 1536/7, under *Minutiae cum variis*; cited in translation in John H. Tillotson, *Monastery and Society in the Late Middle Ages: Select Account Rolls from Selby Abbey, Yorkshire, 1398–1537* (Woodbridge, 1988), 234. My thanks to Magnus Williamson for drawing my attention to these two references.

fifteenth century. York had one of the largest numbers of churches in the country during this period, and what remains of its musical heritage is unlikely to be fully or fairly representative. It is highly tempting to hypothesize that, as a result of the later waves of the Reformation, music collections including the York Masses, *Ybi* 2 and *Ybi* 9 were sold off as binding material, only to be used in books belonging to the Minster itself, which in turn assured their survival to the present day.