

There's more than one v

DAY 6

There is more than one way to enter a cathedral. All week I've been entering as a musician and a tourist; today I decided to enter as a pilgrim.

I was one of six hard-core attendees at the 7:30 a.m. matins service, held in an intimate little side room two hours before the building opened to the public. After the service the priests disappeared and left me to wander at will throughout the vacated building, and I discovered that an empty cathedral is completely different from a full one.

When you are alone in a cathedral, the slightest movement creates echoes that can carry across the building - so you don't stomp around snapping pictures and chattering to yourself. You step ever so softly from one beauty to the next, soaking yourself in it and preserving its memory, not as a relic, but as an imprint on your soul. You think about the hearts and minds of the people who poured their lives into it, never knowing if another human being would ever see the result.

After about an hour, workers came along and started dusting, flicking light switches, and arranging flowers. One whistled. This, too, was holy. There was love in these actions, as much as in the builders'.

That afternoon, the choir was admitted to the Chapter House - a large, domed, octagonal room, with stained glass windows filling seven walls and elaborate tile-work on the floor. This space, with its carefully engineered acoustics, is perhaps the most resonant and stirring in the building. And what do 40 choristers do when given three minutes in one of the most resonant rooms in Christendom? Why, of course, they sing.

Singing the Evensong service is a moving experience, but this was different. This was singing not as performance, but as pilgrimage. Our voices seemed to swirl around us, reverberating for long moments after our singing stopped; we stood, motionless and transfixed, listening to our own imprint on



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this place.

We will always remember that sensation. We carried it with us through Evensong, and onto the bus ride home. We kept it with us at the pub and in our beds. Tomorrow we will wake up and the memory will still be there, bright and colourful and glowing like the windows that surrounded it. We will never forget York Minster.

DAY 7 - Land of Shoes and Stateliness

Today I ditched the cathedral and went shopping.

It started with a visit to Clark's, because my feet have been hurting for seven days now, and there was a 50 to 75% off sale, which meant, of course, that I had to buy three pairs of shoes. In two days I will have to somehow coax them into my bulging suitcase. I'm not worried. If I run out of space, I'll just ask the soprano down the hall to put them in one of her three new purses.

Shopping, it seems, is central to the York experience for many of us, but the area offers many other adventures as well. There are dungeons, castles, crypts and towers. Some of us have gone to the theatre, and others have gone to Harry Potter. Today there was an organ recital, and yesterday a group of women drove to the seaside.

And then there are the pubs, all with valiant names like The Lamb and the Lion and The Black Swan. The Black Swan proved to be quite a disappointment, especially since one of our basses had assured us that it was "the best pub in England." He'd read it online, so it must be true, right? No worry, though. There's always another one around the corner, just

waiting for a flock of Canadians to descend on it and bring the place to life.

Yes, we certainly have descended on York. We run into each other at the market and on the streets. The bus drivers recognize us, especially those of us who ask for directions to the same place every day, just to be sure; and the cathedral workers are getting to know us as well. In fact, we've been accorded a certain degree of status here in this land of propriety and stateliness, as we sweep past the queues of simple tourists each day with those four magic words, "We're with the choir."

DAY 8 - Land of Wine and Chivalry

I have three bodyguards.

It's been a necessary precaution for me in York this week, because every night a group of people heads off to the pub, and every night I say, "Gee, I'd love to, but I've got this article to write for The Examiner." So the compromise has been that I go out with them anyway, and then some brave soul escorts me home early so I don't have to traverse any dark British