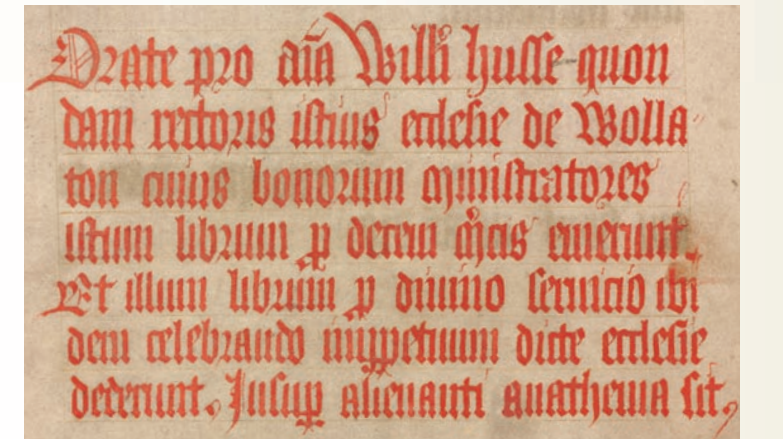


The Wollaton Antiphonal

St Leonard's Church, Wollaton



The Wollaton Antiphonal is extraordinary for many reasons – not least because of its long association with a single owner, St Leonard's Church, Wollaton. It was purchased in 1460 by the executors of the late rector, William Husse, who wished to provide a gift for the church.



An invitation to pray for the soul of William Husse was added to a blank page of the Antiphonal (MS 250 f.206v).



Blue capital letters are embellished with faces, both human and animal (MS 250 f.196).

The magnificent volume had been originally commissioned for Thomas Chaworth of Wiverton, Nottinghamshire. Its physical creation was a major achievement, involving the preparation of more than 207 skins to make 412 leaves measuring 575 x 366mm. Its decoration was equally ambitious. As well as 23 historiated initials, it contains many heraldic elements, honouring the ancestors of Chaworth and his wife Isabella Aylesbury. A charming detail is the addition of ink sketches of faces within many initial letters.

Typical features of the most beautiful leaves can be illustrated by this example (*left*). The feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary has a simple decorated border, including the Chaworth shield. The chant “Tota pulchra es” follows the initial, which contains an image of Mary, with golden rays surrounding her blue cloak, and four angels in the background. The rubrics ‘p’ and ‘a’ direct the singers as they follow the sequence of ‘psalmus’ and ‘antiphon’. The image of three priests on a later leaf shows how such a choir book was used.

The Antiphonal inevitably suffered over the centuries, with damp and mould destroying whole sections and its decayed binding limiting any opening. Since 2001 its conservation has steadily progressed, generously supported by the National Manuscripts Conservation Trust, the Pilgrim Trust and others. The late Dr Nicholas Hadgraft had completed over half of the volume before his sudden death in 2004. His plans for its treatment are being pursued. Digital images of the manuscript are also being captured as the project enters its final stage.



The initial for Psalm 97 shows three priests with a noted book on a lectern (MS 250 f.241v).

The conservators Nicholas Hadgraft and Cheryl Porter discuss the proposed work with representatives from St. Leonard's Church (Geoffrey Howard, Canon David James, Malcolm Stacey and Anne Walters) 2001.



The parchment is held in tension as conservation is undertaken at Dr Hadgraft's workshop, 2003.

Decorated leaf from the Wollaton Antiphonal (MS 250 f.369).