

Sunderland Minster!

A Minster Church with a proud community history



Sunderland Male Voice Choir evolved from the former Shiney Row Male Voice Choir in July 2022.

The Choir has recorded and performed some great material over the years. Recently, it has embarked on a programme of creating new musical material. Some of this material incorporates new arrangements of traditional numbers.

An exciting new initiative is the creation of brand-new songs based upon the region's rich local heritage and its people.

The Choir is now singing annually at The Mayor's Carol Service in Sunderland Minster.

Members of the Choir undertook some research work in preparation for a community project bid, which included Sunderland Minster.

The Choir has taken the opportunity to harness this work to help create a new song on Sunderland's rich heritage.

The Sunderland Minster Project

Sunderland Minster was only created in 1998 when Sunderland was granted city status.

A church dedicated to St. Michael and All Angels has however stood on this site for over 1000 years. For most of that time it has been known as Bishopwearmouth Parish Church.

The Early History

The parish of Bishopwearmouth south of the River Wear was founded in around 940 A.D. with an original stone church being built.

The early history of the church is one of attacks and battles. The church was saved when the Vikings attacked the area in the 8th Century but left it in ruins when they returned in the 9th Century.

In 912, the area was occupied by an Irish Norse Chieftain, Onlafball, and a stone cross remains from this time. Border disputes with Scotland led to the burning of Wearmouth around 1070 and again in 1138 when King David of Scotland claimed all of England, north of the River Tees, destroying, pillaging and burning whole communities. Once again Scotland ransacked the church in 1314. This time, it was by Robert the Bruce after the Battle of Bannockburn.

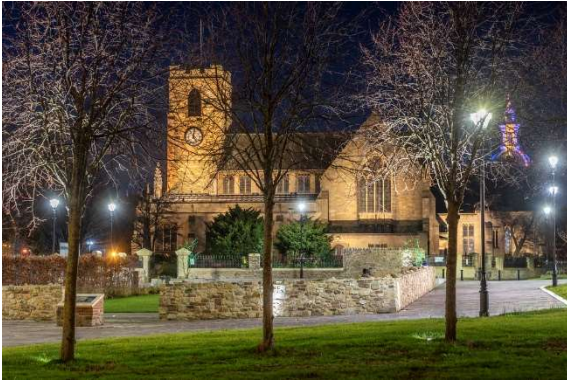
The Middle Ages

In 1620, the church was fitted with beautiful Jacobean woodwork and pews. At that time, the Rector was expelled from his church and replaced by a Presbyterian Minister.

By 1876, the stench from the 53 burial vaults below the main floor of the church was unbearable and they were sealed shortly afterwards.

Sunderland Male Voice Choir

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Sunderland Minster

Structural Damage in 20th Century

In the early 20th Century, due to colliery subsidence, the church began to crumble and was virtually rebuilt, but not all parts of the former church were lost.

In 1934, the nave and parts of the tower were crumbling. In 1943, a high explosive bomb landed in the Alms House Garden. The shock blew out most of the windows and the roof was badly damaged.

The Minster Windows

The main window was the east window and that was replaced in 1950 by D M Grant. The north window is about Benedict Biscop who walks and gestures like a giant Sower, scattering his achievements around him. The central window has areas of intense violet that seemed to emanate from the outer supporting windows and a structure of nebulous columns of colour. This window is about the city with its layers of time, humanity, life, structures, memories, and preoccupations. The installation of these new windows was made possible through a bequest made by the late Theodosia Anne Ferguson who died on 16.07.2002.

Sunderland Male Voice Choir Information Sheets

Sunderland Male Voice Choir is producing a range of information sheets on its new music creation and project work. These sheets will be published within the 'Project' page of the Choir website.

'A church for the whole city!'

The Minster Church of St. Michael and All Saints and St. Benedict Biscop

When the Church of St. Michael and All Angels was re designated as the Sunderland Minster the name of Benedict Biscop was added. The Minster was only the second Minster Church in England since the Reformation (following Dewsbury in 1994).

In May 2007, with the adoption of Benedict Bishop as Sunderland's Patron Saint, the Church was re-designated as an extra parochial place with the addition of Saint Benedict Biscop in its title.

It is a grade two listed building

Until May 2007 the team of ministers carried out traditional parish duties, as well as serving the city by hosting services of remembrance, providing chaplaincies for the retail and industrial workforces in the city centre, as well as being used by the university chaplaincy. It continues to play host to special services and worship events for the whole city as it did for many years as Bishopwearmouth Parish Church.

In 2007, the Minster ended its parish role and these functions were transferred to the parish churches of St. Nicholas and Saint Ignatius.



The Mayor's Carol Service on 11.12.2022