The Carols of the Ritson Manuscript, BL Add. 5665, at Exeter Cathedral: Repertory and Context

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THE CAROLS OF THE RITSON MANUSCRIPT, BL ADD. 5665,
AT EXETER CATHEDRAL:
REPERTORY AND CONTEXT

Anastasia Pilato
Senior Honors Thesis
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I. Introduction

The English carol, a prevalent genre for some two hundred years before the Reformation, has often attracted the attention of literary critics and musicologists for the clues it gives about the intersection of the sacred and the popular in late medieval England. Despite apparently secular and courtly origins, the carol became a widespread poetic and musical medium for the composition and dissemination of devotional, celebratory, political, amorous, didactic, and satirical content.¹ Owing among other factors to the broad scope of the genre, one of the principal questions that a study of this repertory raises is that of performance contexts: who were the performers and their intended audiences, and what purpose did this music serve for them? Scholars have sought answers to these questions using a variety of sources and methods: formal parallels with other genres, internal textual characteristics, and the scattered accounts of their performance, to name a few. This thesis will approach the question by focusing on a single late fifteenth-century source known as the Ritson Manuscript (London, BL Add. 5665), the composers named in it, and the institution where it was produced.

Several aspects of the Ritson Manuscript and its preservation make it a valuable source for detailed study with reference to the genre of the carol. Not only have its connections to a specific institution, Exeter Cathedral, been firmly established,² it is also unique among fifteenth-century sources containing polyphonic carols for its attributions to two composers: Richard Smert and John Trouluffe.³ As a result, it is possible to balance conclusions drawn from the manuscript itself with pertinent information preserved in records kept at the cathedral. The present study, therefore, contains elements of a commentary on the portion of the manuscript in

which the carols appear, while seeking to focus this examination on the questions that continue
to surround the genre, among which that of performance contexts looms large. The principal
primary sources referred to, in addition to the Ritson Manuscript, are a collection of medieval
liturgical books in the Exeter Cathedral library—comprised among others of an ordinal, a
pontifical, a missal, and a necrology—and documents such as financial accounts that provide
details, if scattered ones, about the lives of the composers. While the picture formed by piecing
together such details is far from complete, it does shed some light on our understanding of the
genre and its function or functions.

II. The Origins of the Carol

The carols of the Ritson Manuscript, which date from the third quarter of the fifteenth century, provide an example of the polyphonic carol between its first emergence in the early fifteenth century and the radical changes it underwent during the Tudor era. Polyphonic carols, however, stem from a considerably older monophonic tradition. The genre appears to originate in a twelfth-century French courtly dance known as the carole, in which one or more of the dancers would provide music by singing. The term first occurs in English-language texts in this sense around 1300, but it comes by the early fifteenth century to denote a song with a specific poetic and musical form: verses alternate with a refrain or burden that both opens and concludes the piece. The connection between the dance-song and poetry in burden-and-stanza form remains to some extent obscure. Richard Leighton Greene, whose account of the genre’s early history held sway in English-language investigations for many years, concluded that the carole included an

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4 Catherine Keyes Miller, “A Fifteenth Century Record of English Choir Repertory” (PhD diss., Yale University, 1948), 2; Lane et al., The Ritson Manuscript, i.
5 Margit Sahlin, Étude sur la Carole Médiévale (Uppsala: Almquist & Wiksells Boktryckeri, 1940), 1-3.
7 Ibid., 116.
element of responsorial singing that influenced the form of the English carol, which also juxtaposes a soloist with a group of singers.\(^8\) Recently, Robert Mullaly has argued instead that individual singers performed music for *caroles* in turn, and that the idea of responsorial performance rests on misreadings of pertinent texts.\(^9\) Whatever its relationship to its antecedents, however, it is the carol as a strophic song with a burden that gained incredible popularity in late medieval England, first as a secular and later as a sacred genre.

The carol’s transition from popular song to sacred art music is another elusive element in its history. While this transformation was never complete—secular carols continued to coexist beside their sacred counterparts into the sixteenth century—carols about Christmas, the saints, and other teachings of the Church account for the majority of surviving examples from the mid fifteenth century on.\(^10\) Many of the earliest recorded sacred carols are *contrafacta* of secular ones, suggesting that this development may have been an intentional one.\(^11\) Such appropriations of popular secular song forms for spiritual purposes are often attributed to the Franciscans, whose concern with promoting lay piety, and specifically vernacular sacred music, is well documented.\(^12\)

In addition to acquiring a sacred dimension, carols of the fifteenth century begin to appear in short polyphonic settings and later in increasingly elaborate ones. The earliest polyphonic carols are largely syllabic, homophonic, and treble-dominated. The shift from burden to verse is often emphasized by a contrast in the number of voices—usually three voices in the burden and two in the verse, although more complex structures also occur. Many of these

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8 Greene, *The Early English Carols*, xlv-xlvi.
10 See Greene’s list of themes, *The Early English Carols*, xiii.
12 Greene, *The Early English Carols*, cxxi.
characteristics carry over into carols of the second half of the fifteenth century. The chief
development that distinguishes the carols of the Ritson manuscript from earlier polyphonic carols
is simply the complexity of the music: the Ritson carols are melismatic and expansive works
clearly intended for performance by accomplished musicians. Thus by the third quarter of the
fifteenth century the carol’s transformation from courtly and popular song to sacred polyphony is
complete. The works discussed below stand in an established tradition of art music, but one
whose appeal probably rested to some degree on an awareness of its popular roots. Before
considering these carols and their contexts in more detail, however, it will be of benefit to take
into account the research of scholars who have examined some of the same issues from a variety
of other angles.

III. Proposed Performance Contexts

The renewed understanding, in the early twentieth century, of the term carol in its medieval
sense—as a song with burden and verse—has consistently raised questions about the genre and
its performance context. While it seems unlikely that every song in this form could be intended
to serve a single purpose, many scholars have sought to identify an overarching function that can
account for the vast majority of them. This desire to generalize may have arisen because in spite
of their diversity, the carols are drawn together by a number of striking features: the uniformity
of structure, the overwhelming representation of Christmas-related themes, and the frequent
presence of devices such as macaronic verse.

Richard Leighton Greene laid the groundwork for the study of medieval carols in his
book *The Early English Carols*, a collection of nearly 500 carol texts with a lengthy introduction
in which he establishes the nature of the genre, examines its origins, and considers
correspondences with other genres based on textual connections. He undertakes a detailed
analysis of the sources of Latin lines in the numerous macaronic carols, providing lists of lines borrowed from the liturgy. He observes that the main sources for such borrowings are hymns, sequences, and antiphons, for very practical reasons: “As they were borrowed for incorporation without change into the verses of song, it is not surprising that most of them are drawn from those parts of the ritual which are metrical, or at least rhythmical, units, that is, the hymns, prose or sequences, and the antiphons.”  

Although he points out these connections, however, he argues against the conclusion that such works were intended to serve purposes similar to the chants from which they draw their Latin phrases. On the contrary, he concludes, “Beyond all question the principal use of the kind of carol which predominates in this collection was at celebrations involving feasting or social dining.”  

He advances evidence to support this conclusion in the form of records of payments made for the singing of carols and of literary and historical accounts of such performances.

The relationship between carols and elements of the liturgy has remained a compelling one, however, and not all scholars have been satisfied that no more sacred contexts for their performance existed than those Greene cites. Margit Sahlin’s Étude sur la Carole Medieval, a philological study of the French word carole and its counterparts in other European languages, proposes a radically different theory of the carol’s origins and function—one that exerted nearly as much influence as Greene’s view for a number of years. Sahlin suggests that English carols “are often nothing but popular litanies, intended, it seems to us, to be sung for processions and for sacred dances on ecclesiastical feasts.”  

She bases this conclusion on the frequent presence of appeals for mercy and intercession in the burdens of carols (in phrases like “Miserere nobis”

13 Greene, The Early English Carols, lxxxv.
14 Ibid., xxxviii.
15 “Ces carols ne sont souvent que des litanies populaires, destinées, nous semble-t-il, à être chantées aux processions et aux danses sacrées des fêtes ecclésiastiques.” Sahlin, Étude sur la Carole Médiévale, 56.
and “Sancta Maria, ora pro nobis”) and proposes an etymology of carole that would accord with her assessment: “The thesis that we intend to maintain, is that the word carole arises from the processional cry Kyrie eleison so popular in the Middle Ages, and that the dance-song carole is intimately bound up with the Catholic faith.”

Thus in Sahlin’s view, the sacred dimension of the carol was intrinsic rather than acquired.

Although Sahlin’s theory about the etymology of carole gained few supporters, several musicologists have taken up her assessment of the carol as a “popular litan” for use in processions and identified musical evidence in support of the same conclusions. Catherine Miller advanced four points in favor of this view: the high proportion of other processional music in three of the four fifteenth-century manuscripts containing polyphonic carols, the use of Latin rubrics such as In die nativitatis (“On Christmas Day”) in the Ritson Manuscript and occasionally in other sources, the presence of textual and (much more rarely) musical borrowings from the liturgy, and the resemblance between the carol and the conductus, another genre used in processions. John Stevens cites Miller’s four points in his introduction to Mediaeval Carols, a volume intended as a musical counterpart to Greene’s collection of texts, and further states that “the earliest carols, especially, were written as ‘popular litanies’ for use in ecclesiastical processions, but any procession, civic or courtly, provided a suitable setting.”

Rossel Hope Robbins presented a more extensive discussion of the evidence in favor of this theory, seeking to answer contrary viewpoints such as the one maintained by Greene.

Robbins takes pains to prove that the carol owes far more to the church than to popular song: “I

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16 “La thèse que nous nous proposons de soutenir, c’est que le mot carole provient du cri processional Kyrie eleison si populaire au moyen âge, et que la danse chantée carole est intimement liée au culte catholique.” Sahlin, Étude sur la Carole Médiévale, 81.
suggest the earliest Middle English carols were made by ecclesiastical authors and composers specifically for singing in church processions, and that this function is that of at least 80 percent of all extant carols.”

His article expands considerably on the arguments outlined by Miller. He identifies many of the Latin tags listed by Greene as portions of hymns and sequences intended for use in processions. Like Miller, he considers the other contents of the manuscripts containing carols, observing that processional music is particularly well represented, and he cites the presence of the Latin rubrics as an indication of liturgical use. A fifteenth-century English translation of Asperges me, an antiphon used for the processional sprinkling of holy water before mass, provides support for the idea that vernacular processions could have been used. Robbins rejects Greene’s explanation of the origins of the carol as a dance-song, claiming that there is little or no evidence for the existence of such a genre England.

While Robbins presents some thought-provoking evidence in support of his position, his arguments often fall into simplistic statements and unwarranted conclusions. He assumes, for example, that two genres of the same form must necessarily be intended for the same function: “These Latin cantilenae have the same form as the English carols, that is, quatrains with a refrain and burden, evolving from the processional conductus. Thus, the Latin and English pieces share the same liturgical use.” Toward the end of the article he resorts to reasoning from lack of evidence: “What is the evidence of the early description of dances...in, for example, Giraldus Cambriensis, Matthew of Paris, the Brut, Fabyan, and some Dominican sermons? Not a single excerpt is in carol form. Surely, if dance carols exercised the commanding influence claimed for them, there would be one example left?”

Although Robbins makes some reasonable assertions,

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21 Ibid., 562.
22 Ibid., 576.
the evidence is not sufficient to prove all of his claims, and as a result his arguments have not assisted the processional theory in gaining wider acceptance.

A different theory about the use of carols in the medieval English liturgy, that of Frank Ll. Harrison, has gained respect more consistently. In this theory, which places carols within the context of another transitional point in the liturgy, the Benedictamus Domino sung at the conclusion of Vespers was replaced on feast days first by troped Benedictamus settings and conductus and later, as the conductus waned in popularity, by carols.23 The presence of such phrases as “Deo gratias” and “Benedicamus Domino” in a number of the carols led Harrison to conclude that “the movement begun by the [Franciscan] friars was taken up in other communities, and provided Benedictamus substitutes acceptable to church authorities for use in the Christmas season and on occasions of national prayer or thanksgiving.”24 He also notes that Christmas and the following feasts were “days of special license”25 and that an Exeter ordinal explicitly allows another polyphonic piece to substitute for the Benedictamus Domino, whereas no similar latitude is extended to the music of processions. Other carols of a less devotional nature, including those of general moral counsel, would have been sung during banquets as described by Greene.26 The connections Harrison drew between Benedictamus tropes, conductus, and carols were corroborated four years later by his discovery of a gradual that included a collection of just such a combination of pieces.27 It is this discovery, to a large extent, that has gained his theory a degree of recognition.

24 Ibid., 418.
25 Ibid., 417.
26 Ibid., 418-419.
More recently, John Caldwell returned to many of the questions that English carols tend to raise in a study of a piece from the Selden Manuscript, *Glad and blithe mote ȝe be*, a vernacular polyphonic setting of the sequence *Laetabundus exultet fidelis chorus*. This piece is not itself a carol; rather, it follows the exact form of the sequence, with a succession of repeated sections. Nevertheless, it has close connections to the carols of the Selden Manuscript and other sources as well as to the chant from which it is derived. Macaronic *Laetabundus* carols in two manuscripts incorporate elements of the sequence, although to a lesser extent than does this direct translation.\(^{28}\) Caldwell prefaces his discussion of *Glad and blithe* with musings on the relationship between vernacular music and the medieval English liturgy, concluding, “The carol is bound to be at the centre of any investigation of the links between vernacular polyphony and the liturgy.”\(^{29}\) In an effort to place the question within the broader context of studies of medieval sacred polyphony, he observes that the carol is not alone in its ambiguous status, but rather “is in exactly the same ambivalent relation to the liturgy as are the motet and the cantilena,”\(^{30}\) and, he mentions earlier, the conductus. He adopts an open-ended approach to the question of liturgical location, taking both Sahlin’s and Harrison’s theories into consideration as possibilities. In addition to carols, he mentions several fourteenth-century vernacular versions of another sequence, *Stabat juxta crucem Christi*, with the remark, “We should not assume that their use in the liturgy would have been unthinkable,” and takes a similar view of Thomas Packe’s macaronic *Te Deum* in the Ritson Manuscript: “Again, one wonders whether such a concoction could have been used in the normal liturgical position of the Te Deum.”\(^{31}\)

\(^{28}\) Stevens, *Mediaeval Carols*, nos. 20 and 105.


\(^{30}\) Ibid., 288.

\(^{31}\) Ibid., 291.
Finally, Kathleen Palti included a discussion of performance contexts for fifteenth-century carols in her dissertation, a study of three primarily unnotated collections of lyric poetry dominated by songs in carol form. Because she focuses not on a genre as such but on specific manuscripts, which include other poetic forms as well as an abundance of carols, she does not restrict her discussion of performance to sources that mention carols but also includes more general references to singing and songs. She draws on the extracts identified by Greene as well as other references to social singing and caroling in payment accounts, letters, and sermons. While she acknowledges, based on Harrison’s findings, that “there is some evidence that carols were occasionally performed in church,” she concludes, “more documented are performances of carols outside of church.”

She does mention one case of ecclesiastical performance, but it interests her chiefly because of its reference to the merrymaking that followed. Ultimately, she refrains from making any overarching statement about the performance of medieval carols, observing, “Greene and Robbins’ hypotheses seem to have suffered from an eagerness to explain the carol as a homogenous genre with a linear history and unitary function.” Instead, she concerns herself with the specific songs of her study, whose subject matter often makes them better candidates for performance in halls and taverns than in the choir.

The scholarly debate on the performance contexts of carols has in some respects ended much in the same place that it began, with the exception that more recent studies have chosen to focus on individual cases rather than attempting to determine the function of all or even most carols. Theories about the performance of carols, from Greene’s foundational study in 1935 through the past decade, place them roughly in two categories: what John Stevens calls

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32 Kathleen Palti, “Synge We Now Alle and Sum: Three Fifteenth-Century Collections of Communal Song” (PhD diss., University College London, 2008), 44.
33 Ibid., 194.
34 Ibid., 44.
“household music” and sacred, often liturgical, music. Proponents of the former theory have pointed to documentary evidence, while those in favor of the latter have drawn on the numerous, often complex, connections between the carol and liturgical genres. Thus while the secular uses of carols are relatively clear, our understanding of ecclesiastical contexts remains incomplete.

IV. The Exeter Carols
A. The First Layer of the Ritson Manuscript
The portion of the Ritson Manuscript that contains carols gives the impression of a collection compiled with care but also used in performance, perhaps for some time after its initial production. The manuscript as a whole contains a diverse collection of music compiled over a period of forty or fifty years and comprised of five fairly distinct layers. The first layer is the one in which the carols appear and is perhaps the most uniform of the five: forty-four carols are followed by a monophonic secular song, an untexted fragment, and three settings of the antiphon Nesciens Mater. All of these pieces, which take up roughly the first fifty folios of the manuscript, are believed to be in the same hand, although they display varying levels of skill on the part of the scribe. There are certainly a number of errors, which have been either crossed out or covered over with strips of paper and in a few cases allowed to stand. All but two of the carols begin with elaborate initials in red and blue that must have been added last; Miller believed these were the only element of this layer written professionally. The Nesciens Mater settings, however, do not have ornate initials, nor does the song Y have ben a foster long, although space is left for one.

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36 Lane et al., The Ritson Manuscript, i.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid., 31.
The material of the manuscript also points to a desire to conserve resources while creating a durable and lasting book: most of the folios are made of paper, but interspersed with these at intervals are leaves of vellum.\textsuperscript{39} Catherine Miller, who based her study on a facsimile of the manuscript, identified these leaves as the outer ones of gatherings, perhaps because of the nearly regular recurrence of two vellum folios separated by six paper ones, suggesting gatherings of four bifolios, the outermost of which is vellum. All other detailed studies of the manuscript postdate the book’s rebinding in the 1960s,\textsuperscript{40} and details of the gathering structure are now nearly impossible to ascertain, since almost every leaf is inserted individually into the modern binding. Some of the pairs of vellum folios, however are of one piece,\textsuperscript{41} suggesting that these are not the outsides but rather the centers of gatherings or else later insertions into the manuscript. All of these aspects indicate that the book was compiled with a view to elegance and distinction, albeit perhaps while employing limited resources.

Another element of the manuscript’s appearance that gives some indication of both its purpose and the circumstances of its compilation is the manner of recording the names of composers. Most of the carols that bear attributions (and many do not) are ascribed to Richard Smert. A few are ascribed jointly to Smert and John Trouluffe. The notable element of these attributions is that several of them are elaborately written out; others include brief adages such as “Hyt ys gode to be gracius, sayde John Trouluffe. Well ffare thyn herte, sayde Smert.”\textsuperscript{42} Such exchanges imply not only a spirit of amity between the men but also give clues about the manuscript: given the careful, and occasionally ostentatious, manner of recording the names of

\textsuperscript{39} Catherine Miller, “A Fifteenth Century Record of English Choir Repertory,” 2.
\textsuperscript{40} See Lane et al., \textit{The Ritson Manuscript}, note 4, for a list of studies.
\textsuperscript{41} London, BL Add. 5665, ff. 10 and 11, 27 and 28, 91 and 92, 102 and 103.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., ff. 40v, 41.
the composers and their sayings, it seems likely that this part of the manuscript was compiled either by them or with their direct oversight and perhaps at their expense.

Several features of the book point to its uses after its initial compilation. Corrections or additions appear throughout to clarify pitches, accidentals, rhythm, and other aspects of performance. Some errors were clearly rectified during the writing process, since no text was ever set to canceled notes. In other cases, a line through a stem serves to correct semibreves written as minims, an error likely noticed in the process of performance. One carol contains lines connecting syllables of text with the notes to which they correspond. The designations *medius* and *triplex* have been added next to the middle and upper voices in several three-voice sections. In many cases only the lowest voice, the tenor, had originally been marked as such, while the *medius* and *triplex* markings are in a later hand, one identified as that of the manuscript’s fifth and final layer. It appears, then, that the carols were still sung perhaps as many as fifty years after their original composition. Unfortunately, it is difficult to infer anything about these performances except that they occurred, as the provenance of the manuscript during this period is obscure. Another frequent addition is a small numeral added above or below the second of two semibreves to clarify its duration of two beats. These additions, which could indicate that the singers had difficulty reading mensural notation, may also have been added at a later date, when perfect *tempus* had become rare enough to necessitate such clarification.

The portion of the manuscript with which we are concerned, then, evidently functioned in some sense as an anthology but probably also served a practical purpose as a choir book. It

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44 Ibid., ff. 19, 28, 29, 40v, 45, 46, 49, 50, 53.
47 Lane et al., *The Ritson Manuscript*, v.
was apparently intended to display the distinction of the owners and composers, who in all probability were the same two men. There are a number of indications, however, that these intentions had to be balanced with relatively limited financial resources, which may account for variations in the quality of the materials and execution.

B. The Texts of the Carols

The substantial size of the body of carols gathered in the Ritson Manuscript and its relative independence from other collections make it a valuable source of carol texts as well as polyphonic music. The source is associated with a region at a considerable distance from that of most surviving contemporaneous collections of carols, a fact reflected in the scant concordances between this source and others. The six carols that do appear elsewhere, then—in London, Norfolk, or Yorkshire—must have circulated remarkably widely. The task of seeking to understand the function and significance of the carols of the Ritson Manuscript involves considering the texts as they relate to one another and to those in other sources.

The texts of the carols vary considerably in language and character, but several important features of their subject matter draw them together. All treat themes relating to church feasts or to the cultivation of virtue; they generally act either as prayers addressed to God or a saint or as advice offered to their audience. This element of dialogue with or direct address to a heavenly or an earthly listener is pervasive: none of the carols is written exclusively in the third person.

Subject matter relating to the feast days from Christmas to Epiphany dominates the collection; in those carols that remain, by far the most common theme is good advice.


One of the most significant variables in the texts of the carols is language, as this feature defines the ways in which texts communicate to their audiences and interact with other texts. Six carols are entirely in Latin, sixteen are in English, and twenty-two are macaronic. Within each of these divisions it would be possible to define several distinct categories to reflect variations of poetic form and the use of preexistent material in the text. For example, of the six Latin carols, the burden of one quotes verbatim from a liturgical text (“Salve, sancta parens”), four are freely composed but make extensive use of biblical allusions, and one (Letare cantuaria) contains little trace of influence from preexisting texts.

The carols written in English show different areas of emphasis than those in Latin. Any relationships to sacred texts would be much more difficult to trace in these carols by virtue of the necessity of translating the texts. Nor do they display an interest in incorporating literal translations, although a few of them paraphrase biblical stories such as that of the slaughter of the innocents:

Herode þat was bothe wylde & wode,  
ful muche he shadde of cristen blode,  
To sle þat chylde so meke of mode,  
that mary bare, þat clene may.50

Several are cast as dialogues to include characters such as Joseph or “Syre Cristismasse.” In these carols, the standard form is expanded and contains longer burdens with frequent changes in texture to create the effect of dialogue.

The other carols in English fall primarily into the category of the moral and didactic works already mentioned. Most are more general in subject matter, but some present specific petitions for the peace and prosperity of the kingdom. One of the last carols in the manuscript begins with a burden reminiscent of an earlier carol, Do welle and drede no man: “The beste rede

that I can, / Do welle and drede no man.” The verse, however, shifts abruptly from offering advice to offering a prayer:

God sende vs pese & vnite
in engelond, with prosperite,
and geffe vs grace to overcome
alloure enimys & putte adowne
pat we mow syng, as y sayde than,
do welle & dred no man.51

On the basis of the mention, later in the carol, of an article of dress banned in 1465, Greene dated this text to about that year, although he believed the manuscript itself to be much later.52 According to Miller’s and Lane’s studies, however, both text and music could date from the 1460s or 1470s, when bloody struggles between vying claimants to the throne would have leant especial poignancy to prayers for peace and unity. One other carol contains even more explicit war-time petitions:

Ihesu for thy mercy endelesse,
Saue thy pepill and sende vs pesse.

Ihesu for thy wondes ffyfe
saue fro shedyng cristayn blode
sesee all grete trobill of malice & stryffe,
& of oure neȝbores sende vs tydinges gode,
blessed Ihesu.53

These carols, then, while they do not focus on a specific day of the year, appear appropriate for performance at times of supplication on behalf of the realm.

The macaronic carols present a far more complex picture with respect to borrowed phrases of text, although a number of them display great uniformity of form: a burden comprised of two eight-syllable lines, in Latin, precedes a verse of four lines, the last of which is shorter

51 Ibid., f. 51.
52 Greene, The Early English Carols, 447.
and also often in Latin. The carols that number 98, 99, 101, 107, 108, and 111 in Stevens’s
*Mediaeval Carols* exemplify this form, one typical of fifteenth-century carols.\(^{54}\) The final line of
the verse is an especially good candidate for the placement of liturgical borrowings, many of
which have been traced by Greene.\(^{55}\) Some of the macaronic carols integrate the two languages
more thoroughly, which may mean that the Latin portions have not been borrowed from any
other source but simply composed concurrently with the rest of the poem (for example in no. 78,
*Sonet laus per secula*). A third manner of incorporating both languages is the juxtaposition of a
Latin burden and English verse, as in numbers 90 and 91 (*O Radix Jesse* and *O Clavis David*), in
which the burden is a loosely paraphrased versification of the antiphons *O Radix Jesse* and *O
Clavis David* and the first verse, rather than stating new text, essentially offers an English
translation of the burden. Another example of the same principle is number 103, *Nascitur ex
virgine*. Such deviations from the common form of macaronic carols make these pieces ideally
suited to didactic purposes.

Those carols with texts that occur both in the Ritson Manuscript and in other sources,
though relatively few in number, provide some indications about the conception and
dissemination of these works. While the three earlier fifteenth-century collections of polyphonic
carols have a considerable amount of material in common,\(^{56}\) none of the music of the Ritson
carols occurs in any other source.\(^{57}\) Six of the texts do occur in other musical and non-musical
manuscripts, and many of these in more than one: four are present in the “Selden Carol Book”
(Oxford Bod. MS. Arch. Selden B. 26) three are in a primarily unnotated collection of carols and

\(^{54}\) Greene, *The Early English Carols*, cii.
\(^{55}\) Ibid., lxxvi, xci, civ.
\(^{56}\) Manfred Bukofzer, “Holy-Week Music and Carols at Meaux Abbey,” in *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance
Music* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1950), 166.
\(^{57}\) Miller, “A Fifteenth Century Record of English Choir Repertory,” 31.
songs (Bod. MS. Eng. Poet. e. 1), three are in the commonplace book of Richard Hill (Balliol College, Oxford MS. 354), one is in the “Trinity Roll” (Trinity College, Cambridge MS. O.3.58), and one is on the reverse of an indenture (Bridgewater Corporation Muniments, 123). In the case of the four textual concordances with the Selden manuscript, a source that was associated with Worcester Cathedral, the separation of provenance and the lack of clear relationships in the music make it unlikely that the Exeter composers knew the settings contained in the Selden manuscript. Moreover, the texts of the six carols themselves differ enough to rule out the likelihood that the writer of one manuscript copied directly from the other, so that the existence of further sources that do not survive can be inferred. It is consequently possible to conclude that each of the carols that appears both in the Ritson Manuscript and elsewhere circulated extensively, either as a text alone or as a monophonic song.

The approach taken by the composers of the Ritson carols to what must in some cases have been well-known poems shows a concern for creating distinctive and even elaborate music. All of the Ritson carols that also appear in other musical sources exceed their counterparts in length and in rhythmic and melodic complexity. Another indication of the importance placed on compositional skill is the presence of two different settings for two of the texts, Pray for us, thow prince of pes, (fols. 37v-38 and 48v-49) and Iesu, fili virginis (fols. 29v-30 and 43v-44). Multiple settings of a single text by the same composer or in the same manuscript are common enough within many sacred genres, but no other instances survive of such treatment for a carol in this period. Because of their vernacular language and probable secular origins, it is possible to stress the popular side of carols at the expense of elements that bring them further into the realm of art

59 There is one case, however, of a text with settings in both manuscripts that bear some melodic resemblance to one another: “Alleluia: Now may we myrthis make.” (Mediaeval Carols, nos. 20 and 105)
music. The treatment of widely-disseminated texts in the Ritson Manuscript is one such element. While it is perfectly likely that these texts were chosen in order to appeal to audiences to whom they were already familiar, such intentions appear to be balanced with a desire to bring credit to the composers.

C. Musical Style

The Ritson Manuscript has been described as a source that serves to fill in gaps in the record of the development of English music, an observation that certainly applies to the development of the carol. While unmistakably belonging to the same tradition as the carols of the Trinity, Selden, and Egerton sources, the carols of the Ritson Manuscript are considerably more ambitious and forward-looking in style. Phrase structure is one area where this development is apparent. Whereas frequent cadences followed by a pause are a defining characteristic of early polyphonic carols, intermediate cadences in the Ritson carols are often weakened by continued motion in one of the two voices, causing phrases to overlap. It is also common for a short rest to precede the beginning of a new phrase in one of the voices while the other voice continues without pause, filling in the space that is usually empty in earlier carols. Some of these staggered entrances contain hints of imitation. While it is difficult to assess whether such scattered occurrences are mere coincidences, a case like the portions of no. 101, Jesu, fili Dei, shown in example 1, in which the second voice repeats five or more of the notes of the first, can hardly be unintentional. As with those in the earlier sources, these carols include both syllabic and melismatic passages, but the latter have become longer and more abundant. In various ways,

60 Lane et al., The Ritson Manuscript, i.
then, these carols expand upon the conventions of the genre to create phrases that are longer, more complex, and more musically challenging than those of their antecedents.

**Example 1.** Imitative portions in triplex and tenor of carol *Jesu, fili Dei* (BL Add. 5665 f. 33)

![Example Image](image)

The form of the Ritson carols also allowed their composers to expand upon earlier models. In forty of the forty-four carols, the text of the burden is set twice—usually once for two voices and once for three. In five carols, the word “chorus” appears in red at the beginning of three-voice sections, a direction that appears to indicate that the other sections are to be executed by soloists. These markings, which occur in two other sources, may have been included to clarify a practice introduced around the middle of the fifteenth century, but one that by all indications soon became prevalent. The contrast of texture that characterizes polyphonic carols from their first appearance is thus present and even heightened by the addition of the second burden and the juxtaposition of solo and choral sections.

Several aspects of these carols in addition to texture, form, and phrase structure show tendencies toward innovation. Although cadence formulae such as the under-third cadence, which had been in use since the fourteenth century, are still present, they occur side by side with the cadence characteristic of the sixteenth century, in which suspensions are unembellished. The choice of tempus is also indicative of a later style: the Ritson Manuscript is the only fifteenth-century manuscript in which all carols are written in perfect tempus, minor prolation (corresponding in modern notation to 3/4 time) rather than imperfect tempus, major prolation

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(corresponding to 6/8 time). The only exception is the second burden of no. 86, *Ave, decus seculi*, which is the sole example among fifteenth-century polyphonic carols of the use of imperfect tempus, minor prolation (transcribed as 4/4 time)—another stylistic feature that is on the rise in the late fifteenth century and will become standard in the sixteenth. A similarly unusual feature in no. 116, *O blessed Lord*, is the presence of a four-voice section in place of the usual three. Once again, no contemporary carol contains a section with such a texture, although it is one that becomes commonplace by the sixteenth century.

The Ritson Manuscript contains the most ambitious surviving collection of carols of the fifteenth century. In addition to the stylistic innovations it introduces, the sheer number of carols included outstrips that of any other notated source. The music is complex enough to necessitate performance by professional musicians, of whom more than a few would be required in order to execute the sections that specifically call for choral singing. The carols of the Ritson Manuscript are in every respect large-scale works of art music.

V. The Composers

In spite of the apparent prevalence of the carol in the fifteenth century as a poetic and musical genre, relatively few names of poets and composers have survived to document those who took an interest in cultivating it. Two large collections of unnotated carols—those of John Audelay and James Ryman—do contain attributions, and it is largely on the basis of Ryman’s interest in the genre that connections to the Franciscans have been firmly established. The only manuscript besides the Ritson source to contain composer attributions, however, is the Selden Carol Book, in which the initials J.D. (perhaps indicating John Dunstable) and the name Childe

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64 Bukofzer, “Holy-Week Music and Carols at Meaux Abbey,” 166.
65 Greene, *The Early English Carols*, clv.
(which may be the name of a composer or simply a note of ownership) appear.\(^{66}\) Whether this scanty information is due to a disinterest in the genre by the leading composers of the day or simply to an accident of history, the result is a limited amount of data from which to draw conclusions about the interests and intentions of composers. The Ritson Manuscript is therefore a unique case of a substantial collection of carols—indeed, the largest of its kind—with two definitively identified composers.

Before discussing these composers, however, it will prove beneficial to address several areas of ambiguity that surround the attributions of the Ritson carols in order to clarify the assumptions made in the following paragraphs. The primary question is whether all of the carols were composed by the same men, given that the majority of them (thirty-six of the forty-four) are unattributed in the manuscript. Conversely, were there other works by the same composers that no longer survive? To state both questions as one, is the first layer of the Ritson Manuscript synonymous with the output of Richard Smert and John Trouluffe, or are they two distinct sets that only partially overlap?

While we cannot answer either question unequivocally, it is possible to make some informed conjectures based on evidence in the manuscript. We have already seen that the book appears to be an enterprise of the composers themselves for the sake of preserving their own works. The musical style of the carols is relatively uniform throughout the collection but differs significantly from that of carols in other manuscripts (although Ritson dates at most a few decades after the Selden and Egerton sources). These two facts make it probable that all of the carols in the manuscript owe their composition to Smert or Trouluffe. It is of course possible that one or both of the composers wrote other works that have been lost, but because of the evident

\(^{66}\) Ibid., 315.
concern for preserving the music and the names of its composers in this manuscript, it is reasonable to imagine that they took care to include all of their compositions. It is worth observing that Smert’s name is mentioned in isolation by several carols, whereas Trouluffe’s appears only in conjunction with Smert’s where the carols are concerned. (The situation is somewhat reversed with the polyphonic antiphons: two of the three settings of *Nesciens mater* are by Trouluffe, while the third is attributed to both composers.) Smert, therefore, seems to be the principal personality behind the compilation of the collection of carols. He is also the one with firmer connections to Exeter Cathedral, where the book appears to have remained after their deaths. I would suggest, therefore, that Trouluffe is, of the two, the one more likely to have written other music now lost.

Who were these two composers, who so assiduously cultivated polyphonic carols—who are responsible at least in part and quite possibly in whole for the most extensive surviving collection of its era? Both were minor clerics with connections to a secular cathedral. Both owed their appointments to Edmund Lacy, bishop of Exeter from 1420 to 1455, who was himself an accomplished musician. Lacy had been Dean of the Chapel Royal of Henry V before his appointment as bishop of Exeter. He was also a composer, at least of monophonic music: near the end of his life, he composed an office in honor of St. Raphael. As bishop of Hereford and later of Exeter, he is known to have extended patronage to at least six musicians, including John Dunstable and other composers whose works appear in the Old Hall Manuscript.

The older of the two composers, and the one more closely connected to Exeter Cathedral, was Richard Smert. He must have been born no later than 1403 in order to have received

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ordination as a priest in 1427.\textsuperscript{70} In the same year, Lacy appointed him vicar choral at Exeter Cathedral, a capacity in which he continued until about 1430 and again beginning in 1449, following a second appointment by Lacy. Vicars choral were priests appointed to perform musical duties that had originally belonged to the canons—chiefly singing the daily liturgy and memorial masses. From 1435 to 1449, Smert served as rector of Plymtree, a parish about ten miles from Exeter. After returning to Exeter he retained the living of Plymtree but must have deputed his parish duties to a curate, as his presence was required daily at the cathedral.\textsuperscript{71} During the period when the carols were being compiled into their present form, however, he appears to have still identified himself with his parish, for one of the attributions of the carols reads “Ricardus Smert de Plymtre.”\textsuperscript{72} He apparently continued to hold his position as vicar choral until his death in 1478 or 1479.\textsuperscript{73}

The career of John Trouluffe and the precise nature of his connections to Exeter are more obscure than those of Smert. On the basis of some new evidence, however, it is possible to establish not only that such connections existed, but to observe a definite relationship between Trouluffe and the college of vicars choral. Trouluffe’s name first appears in 1448, when Lacy appointed him to a canonry at a collegiate church in Probus, Cornwall (then part of the diocese of Exeter). He received a similar benefice in Crantock, another Cornish parish. He appears to have been younger than Smert, but he died a few years earlier, around Christmas 1473.\textsuperscript{74}

Despite Trouluffe’s two positions in Cornwall, Nicholas Orme concluded that he was primarily based in Exeter, perhaps as a member of Lacy’s chapel—a conclusion supported both

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 401.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 402.
\textsuperscript{72} BL Add. 5665 f. 17v.
\textsuperscript{73} Orme, “The Early Musicians of Exeter Cathedral,” 402.
\textsuperscript{74} Lane et al., \textit{The Ritson Manuscript}, ii.
by the appearance of his name in the Ritson Manuscript alongside that of Smert and by a record of a gift from Trouluffe to the vicars choral in exchange for daily prayers.\textsuperscript{75} In the latter document, he is referred to as “confrater” of the vicars choral, a designation that Orme interprets as referring to “a lay friend or supporter”\textsuperscript{76} but was ordinarily used by the vicars to refer to one another. Two other sources of evidence point even more strongly in the same direction. Trouluffe’s name appears consistently in the cathedral excrescence accounts, at least those that survive from the late 1460s and early 1470s. Apparently he received an annual payment of eight shillings four pence for the four years between 1468 and 1471,\textsuperscript{77} although the service he rendered is not mentioned: the most description that is ever given is “ex rewardo,” implying remuneration for a service. The record does assist, however, in confirming his presence in Exeter and his fulfillment of some regular duties there after Lacy’s death in 1455 and around the time when the first layer of the Ritson Manuscript was probably compiled.

The other reference to Trouluffe occurs in the collectors’ accounts of the vicars choral in the midst of records of rent paid by tenants of the vicars’ properties. These records begin shortly after Trouluffe’s death and refer to a room where he had previously stayed. The first reads, “Et de inferiori camera quam tenuit nuper Johannes Troloffe vj. d.,”\textsuperscript{78} and later ones give the names of a current tenant—first John Strete and later a Magister Henricus.\textsuperscript{79} Despite the succession of two different tenants, the room continues to be identified with Trouluffe for over a year after his death. There is no record of rent paid for the room during his lifetime, although an entry in 1463 mentions repairs made “in camera Johannis Treloffe,”\textsuperscript{80} and another indirect reference occurs in

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 402-403.
\item \textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 403.
\item \textsuperscript{77} Exeter Dean and Chapter 3754 ff. 1v, 4r, 6v, 9r, 27r.
\item \textsuperscript{78} D&C 3349 m. 3 dorse.
\item \textsuperscript{79} D&C 3349 m. 4; Exeter, Vicars Choral 22235 m.1, m. 2, m. 3.
\item \textsuperscript{80} D&C 3348 m. 2.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
1461, when two rooms are identified as “ij cameris super & subter quas tenet Johannes Trolof.”\textsuperscript{81} The conclusion to which these entries point is that Trouluffe enjoyed a relationship with the vicars choral that allowed him to keep a room in one of their properties without paying rent. If the room mentioned in 1461 is the same one identified with Trouluffe after his death, he must have stayed there for at least ten years. There is thus significant evidence that Trouluffe’s connection with the vicars choral was close and long standing.

The biographical details of Smert and Trouluffe afford a picture, albeit a sketchy one, of two men who devoted great effort to composing polyphonic carols. Both were musicians connected with the primary musical body of Exeter Cathedral, the vicars choral. As one of the vicars, Smert would have spent much of his time participating in singing the liturgy. If Orme’s surmise about Trouluffe is correct, the latter carried out similar duties in the bishop’s household. Both probably had an intimate acquaintance with the music of the liturgy at Exeter, and both owed their livelihoods to Bishop Lacy, whose interest in music also led him to patronize some of the leading composers of the mid-fifteenth century.

VI. Performance Contexts for the Carols of the Ritson Manuscript

Certain clues have emerged through a study of the manuscript, musical style, and composers of the Ritson carols that narrow down the possible performance contexts. That their institutional context was ecclesiastical rather than courtly (whatever the specific occasions for performance) is strongly suggested by the provenance of the manuscript and the identities of the composers. The musical demands of the carols point to performance by a number of skilled musicians, and such people would have been available within the context of Exeter Cathedral. None of these indications, however, helpful as they are, point conclusively to any of the uses that have been

\textsuperscript{81} Vicars Choral 22282 m. 21.
identified or proposed for carols of this period. Judged solely by their texts, some of the carols appear perfectly suited to the kinds of performances identified by Greene (for example no. 79, *Nowell, nowell: The borys hede*), while others would fit much more comfortably in contexts similar to those proposed by Sahlin and Harrison (such as no. 118, *For all cristen saulys pray we*). It is the question of sacred contexts, however, that I shall pursue in the following discussion, partly for practical reasons: if caroling at banquets was a practice among the clergy of Exeter Cathedral, records of it are not likely to have come down to us, as the musicians were probably employed on an ongoing basis and not hired for the express purpose of singing carols.

The discussion of performance contexts that follows will rely on several aspects of the music and manuscript not fully considered in prior scholarship in an attempt to present a detailed examination of the topic. First, the consistent appearance of rubrics for the carols deserves note, both because of its liturgical connotations and as evidence of the expectations of the composers, or at least the scribes, of the carols for their use. In order both to test the theories already proposed for liturgical functions within the specific context of Exeter Cathedral, as well as to explore other possible performance contexts, it will prove beneficial to delve into the traditions of polyphonic music at Exeter Cathedral as recorded in late medieval service books. Finally, a discussion of the use of plainchant melodies within several of the carols will assist us in making some further suggestions about possible contexts.

A. Rubrics and Organization

One striking characteristic of the Ritson Manuscript that appears especially pertinent to the question of performance is the consistent use, at the head of the carols, of rubrics that list the feast days to which the pieces pertain. In only two cases are such headings lacking. The rubrics have frequently been cited in support of theories of liturgical performance because of the
connection they explicitly draw with ecclesiastical feasts.\textsuperscript{82} Much remains unclear, however, about the implications of these connections.

An inventory of the rubrics reveals the close proximity within the calendar of the feasts represented. Ten different designations occur in the course of the manuscript: \textit{in die nativitatis}, \textit{de nativitate}, \textit{in fine nativitatis}, \textit{de Sancta Maria}, \textit{Sancti Stephani}, \textit{de Sancto Iohanne}, \textit{de Sancta Thoma}, \textit{de innocentibus}, \textit{in die circumcisionis}, \textit{Epiphanie}, and \textit{ad placitum}. All of the feast days named fall within Christmastide, with the possible exception of \textit{de Sancta Maria}, which carries a certain amount of ambiguity, as it could theoretically refer to any of five major Marian feasts or to other occasions such as weekly Lady-Masses. However, these pieces could also fit easily within the context of the Christmas season as a time for celebrating the virgin birth.

The almost universal presence of rubrics for the carols suggests a connection with the liturgy, although it does not help to clarify its precise nature. No details are given beyond the day for which the carols are intended, and sometimes not even that. In the absence of specific prescriptions such as \textit{ad missam} that sometimes accompany polyphonic service music, the rubrics cannot be taken as definitive proof that the carols were used liturgically. Nor, however, is the relationship to liturgical music to be overlooked. Kathleen Palti argues that although Robbins “reads rubrication of carols in the Ritson Manuscript (for instance, \textit{In die nativitatis}) to indicate that they were appropriate for specific services,” “the rubrics could equally indicate use in festive celebrations after the liturgical ceremonies.”\textsuperscript{83} Palti’s explanation, however, does not fully account for the real parallels that the rubrication draws with the tradition of liturgical music. The wording of many of the rubrics, which is invariably in Latin despite the use of both Latin and

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{82} Miller, “The Early English Carol,” 63; Robbins, “Middle English Carols as Processional Hymns,” 563; Bukofzer, “Holy-Week Music and Carols at Meaux Abbey,” 148; Caldwell, “Relations between Liturgical and Vernacular Music,” 287.
\textsuperscript{83} Palti, “Synge We Now Alle and Sum,” 43.
\end{footnotesize}
English in the texts of the carols, follows standard forms used in books of liturgical polyphony throughout Europe.\textsuperscript{84} There was no corresponding convention for the use of such designations in music performed in secular settings. The presence of these rubrics thus suggests a desire to relate the carols to the liturgy, if only by analogy.

An understanding of the rubrics as, at the least, an intentional allusion to the liturgy raises questions about the organization of the collection, since the carols do not proceed in the order of the feasts they celebrate. Carols for seven or eight different days appear to be indiscriminately dispersed, along with those to be performed \textit{ad placitum}. If these pieces were intended for ecclesiastical performance, why do they not follow the sequence of the church calendar? The simplest explanation for the seemingly haphazard structure of the collection is that it was compiled gradually, perhaps over a number of years. Such an explanation would encourage a view of the carols in a number of segments rather than as one continuous sequence and would contribute significantly to making sense of the order in which they occur.

The idea that the carols were written out in several installments rather than as a single effort is borne out in several features of the manuscript. The erratic quality of the writing, despite the presence of a single hand throughout the collection, seems best explained as an effect of the passage of time. The music itself may also offer some clues: Miller saw a progression in the complexity of the style, especially with respect to rhythm, as the book continues, indicating “an increasing knowledgeability on the part of the compilers.”\textsuperscript{85} She drew similar conclusions from the use of \textit{fusae}, which become increasingly common in later fifteenth- and in sixteenth-century music, in a few of the last carols in the collection.\textsuperscript{86} Another possible indication of a lapse of

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\textsuperscript{84} Caldwell, “Relations between Vernacular and Liturgical Music in Medieval England,” 287-288.
\textsuperscript{85} Miller, “A Fifteenth Century Record of English Choir Repertory,” 31.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
time between the conception of the undertaking and its completion, or at least of a less than systematic approach to the process, is the presence of several folios of staves that were not filled in until later in the manuscript’s history. While none of these circumstances alone points unequivocally to the conclusion that the completion of the collection took some years, the latter is at least a good explanation for several characteristics of the manuscript.

If we accept the proposition that the collection was compiled gradually, either as new carols were composed or as new copies of existing ones were needed for use in performance, a picture of the book emerges in which a succession of entries are drawn together not only by their placement in the ecclesiastical calendar but by other elements as well. The texts of the first three carols (Stevens’s nos. 76-78) treat saints celebrated during Christmastide, but not Christmas itself. They also share their use of Latin: two are macaronic and the other entirely in Latin.

The next five carols (nos. 79-83) form an equally or perhaps even more self-contained unit. Four are marked in die nativitatis, and the last in die circumcisionis. Carols no. 79 and 80 are the only ones in the collection in which the word “Nowell” appears as the text of the burden. Numbers 80 and 81 are cast as dialogues, another feature not repeated elsewhere in the book. All five focus on the celebration of Christmas with such lighthearted exhortations as “Man, be joyfull & myrth þu make,”—although the authors of the texts also take every opportunity to offer sound advice: “Man, be mery, I the rede, / but be whar what merthis þu make.” The final element that draws them together is their exclusive use of English (with the exception of no. 80, which contains some lines in French): they account for almost a third of the carols that employ no Latin. Given the similarity between these five carols and the contrasts they present with the

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87 Folios. 25v, 39v, 40r, 47v, and 48r.
rest of the collection, could all five have been copied at the same time and for the same purpose? The four for Christmas Day, certainly, could have been sung on a single occasion.

A third, apparently larger, section appears to extend through folio 25 or perhaps 28. Two Marian carols (nos. 84 and 86) occur on either side of the first carol marked *ad placitum* (*In evry state, in evry degre*), followed by five marked *in die nativitatis*, one for St. Stephen, and two for Holy Innocents. Thus far the section, if such it be, holds to the sequence of feast days. It shows a strong presence of Latin carols—four out of the total six in the manuscript. There are also four macaronic carols, while the three that are exclusively in English boast more theological content than those in the preceding section.

The second half of the collection shows less pronounced signs of liturgical sequence, although such an underlying structure could still be present. From the beginning of the collection to folio 28, only one carol is marked *ad placitum*, while nine of those between folios 28 and 53 bear this heading. The rubric *in die nativitatis* is also replaced from this point with *de nativitate*, a more general term, as it could indicate any of the twelve days of Christmas. The rubrics for the carols for St. John, St. Thomas, and Epiphany are the most precise, and based on their placement it would be possible, for example, to view folios 28v through 41r as a unit. The carol to St. Thomas on folios 27v to 28r is the last to use only Latin: from 28v to the end of the collection, all are either English or macaronic.

The use of rubrics in the carols of the Ritson Manuscript invites speculation about their relationship to the liturgy, raising many questions and answering few. It establishes the collection’s rootedness in the nativity season and helps to trace possible connections between groups of carols. Ultimately, however, the rubrics themselves do not give enough detail to lead to conclusions about the specific performance contexts of the carols.
B. Traditions of Polyphony at Exeter Cathedral

One tool for testing the theories of Sahlin and Harrison about the use of carols, with specific reference to Exeter Cathedral, lies at our disposal in the form of indications for the inclusion of polyphonic music in several liturgical books in use at Exeter in the late Middle Ages. The most explicit mention of the practices in place in this period occurs in a passage prescribing allowable times for the use of discant and organum in Bishop John Grandisson’s ordinal of 1337. Another form of evidence of the practice in the following centuries, perhaps up to the time of the Reformation, is marginal glosses that include, or sometimes consists entirely of, symbols used in polyphonic musical notation. These glosses occur in four different books, including the ordinal.

Bishop Grandisson’s instructions for the use of polyphony appear after the calendar but before the main body of the ordinal, in a lengthy section devoted to spelling out the cathedral’s “own observances and customs” (obseruancias proprias et consuetudines). This section, which covers much of the material ordinarily found in a customary rather than an ordinal, begins with a preamble stating the intention of “removing all doubt” (ad omnia dubia tollenda) as to these customs through the issuance of the ordinal, and in particular of the instructions immediately following the preamble. A numbered list of items covered follows, beginning with the duties of various officers and proceeding through topics such as the use of vestments and the distinctions between orders of feasts. The passage that follows is twenty-sixth in the list and is certainly calculated to remove doubt in its thoroughness:

De modo psallendi et modulandi discantandi aut organizandi

Of the manner of singing and measuring discant or organum

In psalmis et ympnis et ceteris cum deum oratis, iuxta beati Autustini consilium, hoc

In psalms and hymns and other prayers to God, according to the advice of the blessed

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89 Exeter, D&C 3502.
91 Harrison, *Music in Medieval Britain*, 47.
Augustine, let that be turned over in the heart which is spoken with the voice. For in vain does the tongue labor if the heart does not pray. For according to Jerome, What a breath does to burning coals, devotion does to prayer. For according to the blessed Bernard, A prayer without devotion is not the voice of man, but rather is the lowing of an ox. But that it may be more reverent and plainer, it must be sung without omission or defect, lest alterations contrary to what is written should occur. It is to be begun the same, and to proceed the same, and to be finished the same, by turns standing waiting and going forward, in order that you may show yourselves to be joined together uniformly by the sweet yoke of the Lord. Also conversations and murmurs and those things that do not pertain to the matter ought to be entirely avoided as the poison of divine education, which destroys everything else. For to be silent or to be absent seems less blameworthy than to be guilty of the three things aforementioned. Nor yet should it be wantonly drawn out more for the sake of the sound than for the content, lest the prayer become a sin, as the blessed Augustine says in his Confessions, Whenever I delight more in singing than in the thing sung, then I confess to having sinned gravely. Furthermore, we forbid singing either discant or organum in the choir except in the times written below. Therefore on major duplex feasts you may jubilare, that is discant, the antiphon for the psalms, never however the psalms themselves, also the responsory, not the versicle or the Gloria, the hymn, and the psalm Nunc dimittis with the antiphon. At Matins the hymn, and at terce and sext and none the antiphon with the responsory for terce, sext, and none, without the versicle and Gloria patri, Te deum laudamus solemniter. In Laudibus hymnum, psalmum Benedictus cum antiphona, et Deo gracias. At Primam, hymnum cum antiphona super Quicumque vult. Ad Terciam, Sextam, et Nona, nichil nisi ad placitum ex devocione. Ad Versperas et adCompletorium, ut supra. Ad Missam in tercia repetizione Officium cum Kyrieleison et Gloria in excelsis, Prosam, Credo, Officium, Sanctus et Agnus et Deo gracias. In minoribus duplicibus festis ut in maioribus, except quod solum novem responsorium potest iubilari. In festis tricipibus quando Invitatorium a tribus

compline, as above. At mass in the third repetition of the office with Kyrieleison and Gloria in excelsis, the prose, creed, office, Sanctus, and Agnus and Deo gracias. In lesser duplex feasts as in greater, except that it is possible to iubilari only the ninth responsory. In triplex feasts when the invitatory is sung by three people, at vespers, the antiphon for the psalm, the hymn, and the antiphon for the Magnificat. At compline, the hymn only. At matins the ninth antiphon and ninth responsory. At lauds, the hymn with the antiphon for Benedictus. At prime, the antiphon for Quicumque vult. At hours nothing. At mass Kyrieleison, the prose, the Sanctus and Agnus. On Sundays and simple feasts of nine lessons or three lessons with the choir director, at vespers, the hymn with the antiphon for the Magnificat. At compline, nothing. At matins the ninth responsory. At lauds, if desired, the hymn and antiphon for the Benedictus. At hours nothing. At Mass, Kyrieleison, the prose, Sanctus and Agnus. On weekdays and simple feasts of three lessons nothing is discanted, except at the memorial of Saint Mary or the Apostles. In processions they should sing and discant proportionately as the quality of the feast requires and the nature of the chant permits. As a liberty, if the seniors desire, in place of the Benedictamus at vespers and at Matins, and at Mass after the Sanctus, they can make organum with voices or organs.  

Grandisson’s instructions, which, according to his preamble, reflect current practices at Exeter Cathedral in the early fourteenth century, presuppose an extensive use of polyphony in both office and mass. Indeed, the expressed desire is that of curtailing a practice that could lead to excess. Despite his injunctions to caution, however, Grandisson’s stipulations permit polyphonic elaboration of a substantial portion of the liturgy on major feast days: in Harrison’s

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92 Dalton, Ordinale Exon., 19-20. I would like to thank Isabella Leake for her translation assistance.
view, “Like all Grandisson’s liturgical provisions they are detailed and specific, but the surprising thing about them in this case is their liberality, for they include several parts of the ritual of which there are no known polyphonic settings either in the fourteenth century or later.”

The emphatic insistence that there be no polyphonic singing “except in the times written below” reflects a desire on the part of Grandisson, whom Nicholas Orme describes as a “formidable bishop,” not to restrict but certainly to codify and control the practices in his cathedral.

Harrison’s remark about the absence of surviving polyphonic compositions that correspond to the liturgical locations Grandisson mentions brings into relief the question of whether the music described here was improvised or notated. This question in turn raises others about the nature of the music and the distinction between discant and organum in Grandisson’s time and the following centuries. The majority of the passage in the ordinal concerns discant, a term used to describe a melismatic note-against-note polyphonic technique characterized by contrary motion between the added voice or voices and the plainchant tenor. Like other early forms of polyphony, discant originated as an improvisatory technique with one singer per part, but by the early fifteenth century it had developed into a notated one with several singers per part, although the term also continued in use specifically to denote improvised polyphony. By this time, discant had been replaced by other compositional techniques on the continent, retaining its popularity primarily in England. In contrast, the technique referred to as organum, as distinguished from discant, in which the plainchant melody was stretched out to accommodate the addition of a florid, more rapidly-moving vox organalis, received little attention from English

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composers.\textsuperscript{97} Even in France its heyday was long past by Grandisson’s time, but the term continued to be used in its more general sense simply to distinguish polyphony from plainchant.

The words discant and organum thus allow several possible interpretations. Organum could mean any kind of polyphony and discant a particular kind in which the plainchant melody is set with a note-against-note added voice. Or organum could refer to notated, and discant to improvised, polyphony. Grandisson offers a tantalizing clue to what he means when he equates discant with the verb \textit{jubilare}, ("jubiletis, id est discantetis") although even this clarification leaves room for multiple readings. By the late Middle Ages the verb \textit{jubilare} and its noun form \textit{jubilus} had come to signify an expression of joy in textless song.\textsuperscript{98} The passage above, however, contains the first attestation of the word to denote polyphonic music, while the next use of the word in this sense occurs about a century later.\textsuperscript{99} Based on several fifteenth-century references to "jubilation" as improvised counterpoint, Dana Marsh suggests that Grandisson intends to convey this meaning.\textsuperscript{100} She also notes, however, that some fifteenth-century theorists who use the word \textit{jubilare} clearly mean polyphony of all kinds.\textsuperscript{101} Another possible association between discant and the traditional idea of \textit{jubilus} could be not spontaneity but simply the melismatic character of the music—a reading that would allow discant to be understood in the sense of a specific technique of notated polyphony rather than improvised counterpoint.

Despite the unavoidable ambiguities in this passage, Grandisson’s directions do provide adequate information with which to assess the probability of performance contexts such as the ones Sahlin and Harrison proposed for the carols of the Ritson Manuscript. After the detailed

\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., 370.
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., 64.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 66.
inventory of allowable uses of discant within the daily mass and office, the last two sentences of the passage, which concern discant used in processions and organum, are striking for the latitude they give to the clergy in these two areas—precisely the two places identified as possible contexts for fifteenth-century carols by Sahlin and Harrison.

The wording of Grandisson’s instructions with respect to processions lends some credence to the idea that elaborate polyphony such as the Ritson carols could have been used as Sahlin proposed, although there are also serious objections to this conclusion. During processions, Grandisson enjoins the choir to “sing and discant proportionately as the quality of the feast requires and the nature of the chant permits,” leaving the assessment of these criteria to his readers’ discretion. Furthermore, the use of the word requirit bears witness to a sense that some occasions deserve more elaborate musical treatment than plainchant provides—an example, perhaps, of Grandisson’s desire to see feasts celebrated with suitable reverence, which led him to introduce numerous reforms in the Exonian calendar.102 Several textual borrowings from processional hymns and sequences occur in the Ritson carols, most notably in no. 109, Clangat tuba, martir Thoma, the text of which bears a close resemblance to the sequence Clangat pastor in tuba used in the procession to the altar of St. Thomas of Canterbury.103 Despite Grandisson’s comparatively open-ended approach to processional music, however, his use of the term discant rather than the more general organum presents problems for this interpretation. If by discant he means improvised polyphony, this wording would at once rule out notated polyphony like the carols. Even if we understand discant as a technique for composing notated music, this technique differs significantly from that used in fifteenth-century carols, making it difficult to read Grandisson’s provision as granting the ability to sing these particular pieces. Whatever the

102 Orme, Exeter Cathedral as It Was, 1050-1550, 85.
103 Greene, The Early English Carols, xcvii.
precise meaning of “discant” in this context, it clearly refers to an elaboration of plainchant, as indicated by the clause “as the nature of the chant permits”; as such it cannot apply to the freely-composed carols. All of these considerations give good reason to continue looking for a more probable context for the carols.

Harrison’s theory of carols as substitutes for the monophonic Benedictamus Domino at the conclusion of office services such as Vespers fits more convincingly with the directions given in the ordinal, which is in fact one of the principal sources he uses to support his position.\(^{104}\) The statement of the uses of organum that concludes Grandisson’s discussion of polyphony indicates not polyphonic elaboration of plainchant, but free-standing works either added to or substituted for elements of the liturgy: “As a liberty, if the seniors desire, in place of the Benedictamus at Vespers and at Matins, and at Mass after the Sanctus, they can make organum with voices or organs.” Harrison observes that variants of the text “Benedicamus Domino” or the congregational response “Deo gracias” occur in a number of polyphonic carols of the fifteenth century; he concludes that sacred carols “provided Benedictamus substitutes acceptable to church authorities for use in the Christmas season and on occasions of national prayer and thanksgiving.”\(^{105}\) This part of his argument, however, does not help greatly with establishing the practice in Exeter, since neither of these texts occurs in any of the forty-four carols in the Ritson Manuscript. The closest textual relationships to the Benedictamus are phrases in some of the English-language carols such as “O blessed Lord”—themselves, however, not exact translations of the short Latin text. The carols of the Ritson Manuscript thus do not fit into Harrison’s concept of the carol as a Benedictamus trope. Since Grandisson’s instructions seem to give the option of a real—that is, potentially textually unrelated—substitution by virtue of the phrase

\(^{104}\) Harrison, “Benedicamus, Conductus, Carol,” 40.
\(^{105}\) Harrison, Music in Medieval Britain, 418.
“loco Benedicamus” or “in place of the *Benedicamus*,” the lack of borrowed texts in the carols does not necessarily rule out the possibility of this kind of use, but it does leave comparatively little evidence on which to base such a conclusion.

A close reading of Grandisson’s instructions for singing polyphony within the Exonian liturgy do not give strong evidence in support of any truly liturgical performance context for the carols of the Ritson Manuscript. Although he permits the inclusion of polyphony in many places, he calls specifically for discant in all but a few of them, indicating that the polyphonic music must take a plainchant melody as its basis, as do only a small minority of the Ritson carols. Carols could indeed conceivably be sung “loco Benedicamus” at Matins and Vespers, but this theory rests on the evidence of carols from other sources rather than those of the Ritson Manuscript itself and thus depends on the assumption of a widespread practice of such substitutions. While Harrison seems willing to infer such a practice, his approach requires a good deal of extrapolation in proportion to the existing evidence. Thus, without discounting his theory, we have reason to carry on further investigation of the subject.

While the most explicit provisions for the practice of polyphonic singing at Exeter Cathedral in the late Middle Ages occur in the passage from the ordinal quoted above, other sources from the two centuries preceding the Reformation give clues about the musical climate in which the carols of the Ritson Manuscript originated. These clues come primarily in the form of musical signs that occur, either with or without accompanying remarks, in the margins of four books and a few other documents. Three different kinds of symbols are used: longs (both black and void, with and without *coronae*), *custodes*, and *signa congruentiae*. While many aspects of these markings remain obscure, the use of multiple symbols associated with polyphonic music and their presence in multiple books from this period give reasonable grounds to suppose that we
may glean some information from them about musical practices at Exeter Cathedral. The table that follows lists the occurrences of these symbols in the ordinal (“O” in the table), the Liber Pontificalis (“P,” Exeter, Dean and Chapter 3513), a notated missal (“M,” Exeter, Dean and Chapter 3515), and a Liber Obitualis (“LO,” Exeter, Dean and Chapter 3675).

Several aspects of the marginal additions of this nature in the Liber Obitualis, which chronicles the obits celebrated yearly from the fourteenth to the early sixteenth century, make them easiest to interpret, and as such a potential key to the same markings in other books. In the first place, the symbols in this book, which include both black and void longs (some with coronae) and signa congruentiae, often occur side by side with directions about the choir and the remuneration they received—most frequently, “a toto choro” and “inter vicarios iv. d.” or a similar sum (or, sometimes, “inter vicarios nichil”). Both of these marginal notes identify times that called for participation by a number of musicians: the largest endowments provided compensation not only to the twenty vicars choral, but also to canons, annuellers (the title given in Exeter to chantry priests), secondaries, and choristers—essentially all of the musical personnel
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ms.&amp; f.</th>
<th>Context in source</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Gloss</th>
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<tr>
<td>O 26</td>
<td>Vigilia natalis Domini. Ad Vesperas.</td>
<td>Antiphona <em>Dum ortus fuerit.</em> ¶ Istam antiphonam incipiat Episcopus, si assit et officium exequatur, uel Decanus episcopo absente, et neutro eorum officium exequente, assignetur excellenciori persone ex parte chori qui officium exequitur. Et sic fiat in omnibus festis maioribus duplicibus. ¶ Tota cantetur antiphona antequam intonetur psalmus <em>Magnificat.</em></td>
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<td>O 26v</td>
<td>Vigilia natalis Domini. Ad Vesperas.</td>
<td>Si vero episcopus exequatur officium, Thesaurarius aut alius in dignitate constitutus ei ministret de libro tenendo, tam in capitu quam collecta in capa serica, et incenset secum maius altare.</td>
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<tr>
<td>O 27</td>
<td>Natali Domini. Ad Vesperas.</td>
<td>Si vero episcopus exequatur officium, Thesaurarius aut alius in dignitate constitutus ei ministret de libro tenendo, tam in capitulo quam collecta in capa serica, et incenset secum maius altare.</td>
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<tr>
<td>O 27v</td>
<td>Natali Domini. Ad Matutinas. In primo nocturno.</td>
<td>Hac die et nulla alia per annum dum legitur leccio prima, ursus finem, unus puer in alba et amictu circa collum, capite nudo, bonam et claram vocem habens, exiens de loco qui est retro magnum altare cum torticio accenso in manu sinistra sua, ueniue ante gradum proximum altari, et lecta lecciono prima conuersus ad chorum cantando octo prima uerba, incipiat responsorium sic, Hodie nobis celorum rex de urginse nasci dignatus est.</td>
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<td>O 76</td>
<td>In die animarum</td>
<td>Si hec Commemoracio in dominica contigerit, differatur in crastinum, et historia Vidi dominum in ipsa dominica inchoetur, ita quod ad Vesperas in die omnium Sanctorum fiat memoria sub silencio de dominica tantum, In dominica vero fiat memoria et medie lecciones de sancto Eustachio sociorumque eius, ad Matutinas et ad Missam.</td>
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<td>P 18</td>
<td>Reconciliacio cimiterij.</td>
<td><em>Aufer a nobis quaesumus Domine iniquitates nostras, ut ad loca tuo nominis prificanda et reconcilianda puris mentibus mereamur introire</em>. Per eundem <em>Dominum</em>. Tunc dicat episcopus flexis genibus ter <em>Deus in adiutorium meum intende</em>. In reconciliacione cimiterij cum ecclesie ut ecclesiam istam et cimiterium istud reconsiliare et sanctificare digneris.</td>
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<tr>
<td>P 18</td>
<td>Reconciliacio cimiterij.</td>
<td>Chorus respondeat <em>Domine, ad adjuvandum me festina</em>, cum <em>Gloria Patri</em>, quo dicto si ecclesia sit reconcilianda in introitu ecclesie dicitur letania; si vero cimiterium in parte occidentis cemeterii versus orientum dicit usque in <em>omnes sancti</em>, orate pro nobis.*</td>
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<tr>
<td>P 18</td>
<td>Reconciliacio cimiterij.</td>
<td>Tunc benedicantur sal, aqua, cineres, vinum, ut habetur in consecracione altarium mutato termino consecracionis in terminum reconciliacionis: finita benedictione deponat episcopus pluviale et sumat scopam cum ysoyo ligatam et incipiat. Asperges me etc. Circumiens ecclesiam et cemiterium aqua spergendo incipiens versus occidentum primo partem ecclesie proximiorem dicendo psalmum 50. Miserere mei Deus. Cum antiphona. Asperges me.</td>
<td>ad istud signum = folio ix</td>
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<td>M 98</td>
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<tr>
<td>LO 26</td>
<td>Calendar, January</td>
<td>Obitus Jordani Lydene et Johannis Lestute. Inter vicarios nihil.</td>
<td>fo. 32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LO 26</td>
<td>Calendar, February</td>
<td>Obitus Johannis Alyn et Eve Alyn. Nihil Inter vicarios.</td>
<td>fo. 32</td>
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<tr>
<td>LO 26v</td>
<td>Calendar, February</td>
<td>Obitus Ricardi Brendysworthy</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>LO 26v</td>
<td>Calendar, February</td>
<td>Obitus Edmundi Lacy episcopi et Henrici Webber decani domini Johannis Simon presbyteri et Johannis Kelle et Juliane uxorum eius per vic a toto coro. fo. 35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LO 27</td>
<td>Calendar, March</td>
<td>Obitus Willimi Brygge vicariij. Item Obitus Alexandri Beare vicariij. Robin fratris eius.</td>
<td>fo. 37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LO 27</td>
<td>Calendar, March</td>
<td>Obitus Thryng et Johanne uxoris eius ac Andre Thryng. Inter vicarios nihil.</td>
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<tr>
<td>LO 27</td>
<td>Calendar, March</td>
<td>Obitus Thome Cook vicariij ac Thome et Blithe parentum eius et Johannis Ballam annuellar</td>
<td>fo. 33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LO 27</td>
<td>Calendar, March</td>
<td>Obitus Petri Carter decaniaj, Domini Martini Dyer canono</td>
<td>fo. 35</td>
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<tr>
<td>LO 27</td>
<td>Calendar, March</td>
<td>Obitus domini Johannis Rowter quondam huius ecclesie annuellarj Willimi Wilksyen et Johhane uxoris eiusdem inter vicarios v d.</td>
<td>fo. 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LO 27</td>
<td>Calendar, March</td>
<td>Obitus Willimi …. Inter vicarios 4 d.</td>
<td>fo. vi.</td>
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<tr>
<td>LO 27</td>
<td>Calendar, March</td>
<td>Obitus Willimi Ffrost cum alijs</td>
<td>fo. i.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LO 28v</td>
<td>Calendar, June</td>
<td>Henrici de Cyrencestra per collectorem reeditum vicariis. In toto choro.</td>
<td>fo. 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LO 28v</td>
<td>Calendar, June</td>
<td>Obitus Henrici Helyer et Johanne uxoris eius</td>
<td>fo. vi.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Event Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>LO 28v</td>
<td>Calendar, June  Obitus magistrorum William Silke W. Godde Inter vicarios x d.</td>
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<td>LO 29</td>
<td>Calendar, July  Alexandri pistatoris fratris nostri</td>
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<td>LO 29v</td>
<td>Calendar, August Obitus Johannes Collshall inter vic. iiijd.</td>
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<tr>
<td>LO 29v</td>
<td>Calendar, August Obitus Richardi … et Henrici Thryng</td>
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<td>LO 30</td>
<td>Calendar, October Magistri Johann Polynn clerici et Domini Johann West presbiteri</td>
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<td>LO 30</td>
<td>Calendar, October Sancti Michaelis Archangeli</td>
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<td>LO 30v</td>
<td>Calendar, November Henrici Berbelond vicari.</td>
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<tr>
<td>LO 30v</td>
<td>Calendar, November Obitus Magistri Johannis Sutton inter vicarios iiijd.</td>
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<tr>
<td>LO 30v</td>
<td>Calendar, November Henrici Brattord subdecani Domini Ricardi Helyer et Laurencij Bodyington patris et matris eius inter vicarios xijd.</td>
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<tr>
<td>LO 31</td>
<td>Calendar, November “hac mense fiat obitus domini morton cardinalis et magistri Johannis Ayse Petri Wylyames et uxoris eius inter vicarios xiiij d.</td>
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<td>LO 31</td>
<td>Calendar, November Cristine Ffyshher</td>
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<tr>
<td>LO 31</td>
<td>Calendar, November Henrici Aleyn fratris nostri</td>
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<td>LO 31</td>
<td>Calendar, December Obitus Magistri Johannis Kysse</td>
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<tr>
<td>LO 31</td>
<td>Calendar, December Sancti Andree Apostoli</td>
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of the cathedral. The entries marked with musical notes, “a toto choro,” specifications about sums paid to the vicars, or some combination of the above, identify places where polyphonic music could be sung, in contrast to memorial masses said by individual annuellers.

Another important key this book provides to understanding these notes concerns the dates of the additions: dates of death for many of the people commemorated provide the necessary information to determine to what period the musical marginal additions belong. Several names stand out as those of Smert and Trouluffe’s contemporaries: Bishop Edmund Lacy, who reigned until 1455; Dean Henry Webber, who died in 1472; Peter Carter, a deacon; and several vicars choral of Smert’s generation—Hugo Thryng, John Scory, and John Tankret. The entries for many of these names are accompanied by void longs, the most frequently occurring symbol throughout the four different books.

While the Liber Obitualis assists greatly in interpreting the musical glosses in the liturgical books, those in the ordinal, viewed in light of this interpretation, give broader indications of how polyphony may have figured in the customs of fifteenth-century Exeter Cathedral. Here custodes occur slightly more frequently than longs, and the signum congruetiae appears only once. Without distinguishing between the different types of symbols, upon surveying the list we find three that fall during Advent, four in the Christmas vigil, four on Christmas Day, and one each on the feast of St. John the Apostle, Ash Wednesday, the second Sunday after Easter during the octave of the Apostles Peter and Paul, and All Souls—a varied assortment, certainly. Nevertheless, many of the days represented have obvious significance within the calendar. The Christmas vigil marks the endpoint of the liturgical season of Advent; Christmas Day and St. John rank as major double feasts; the octave of St. Peter and Paul is

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106 Obit of Dean Henry Webber, D&C 3675 f. 35r.
significant as that of the Cathedral’s patron saint; and the calendar in the ordinal lists All Souls as nine lessons, “quasi duplex festum.”\textsuperscript{107} Several of the excerpts that occur in places of less apparent significance give directions about feast days that fall within seasons of fast (for example, St. Thomas the Apostle, whose feast occurs during Advent), a case where practices like the use of polyphony would need clarification.

Although the marginal notes in the Exeter Ordinal do not give direct information about the carols of the Ritson Manuscript, they appear to show a correlation to the carols in the emphasis they place on the Christmas season. No less than eight of the sixteen musical annotations in the ordinal occur during the Christmas vigil and Christmas Day (as well as one for St. John, another feast during Christmastide). Since the musicians at Exeter Cathedral presumably performed polyphonic music on more than sixteen occasions throughout the year, these notes probably do not indicate all the times when polyphony was used, but they could indicate atypical (although not forbidden) locations for it. In this case, the especially strong presence of these symbols around Christmas would indicate use of polyphony to an otherwise unaccustomed extent.

C. Plainchant Melodies in the Carols of the Ritson Manuscript

Although at first glance it seems to provide the least direct kind of evidence about performance contexts of any of the information drawn upon in this discussion, the use of plainchant melodies in three of the Ritson carols allows us to make some striking connections, all of which point to a certain extent in a single direction. Polyphonic carols rarely draw melodic material from plainchant, so while three carols out of forty-four that do so certainly stand as an exception to the

\textsuperscript{107} Dalton, \textit{Ordinale Exon.}, xlviii.
rule, even this small number exceeds that in any other source. Catherine Miller identified the
plainchant relationships in no. 95, *Te Deum laudamus*, and no. 118, *For all cristen saulys pray we*. The third, no. 84, *Salve, sancta parens*, has not, to my knowledge, been pointed out elsewhere. All three carols display remarkable stylistic features that deserve attention.

Of the three plainchant-based carols, *Salve, sancta parens* occurs earliest in the manuscript, on folios 13v and 14r. It is the only one of the three with a text entirely in Latin, the burden of which comes verbatim from the introit for the Mass of St. Mary: “Salve, sancta parens, enixa puerpera regem.” The carol’s use of the introit text stops here, however, and after the second burden it gives way to rhyming stanzas that bear no relationship to the liturgical text. The chant melody occurs in the uppermost voice, elaborated with a few passing tones and embellished cadences, but structurally faithful to the original: the four phrases of the first burden closely follow the pitches of their plainchant counterparts and all but the first one cadence to the same points (Ex. 2). The second burden presents some new material, but it corresponds to the chant melody no less than did the first, and in some respects even more closely.

**Example 2.** Triplex of carol *Salve, sancta*, burdens I and II; plainchant from Exeter D&C 3515 f. 161.

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108 One of the Egerton carols begins with the same five notes as the chant from which its text is drawn (Bukofzer, “Holy-Week Music and Carols at Meaux Abbey,” 151), and the burden of one carol in the Trinity Roll bears some resemblance to the corresponding chant melody (*Alma redemptoris mater*, *Mediaeval Carols* no. 4).

The careful polyphonic rendering of the introit chant and the Latin text of *Salve, sancta parens* appear to support the idea of a liturgical use for this carol, although this interpretation presents several potential difficulties. While the text of the burden draws on the introit very literally, it contains only the beginning of the liturgical text. The unrelated material in the verses simply implies troping of the introit and therefore does not disprove the idea of this carol as a polyphonic setting of the chant, but the absence of the rest of the original text is less easily explained. The carol could, however, function as an introit trope if, after the final statement of the burden (and thus the final occurrence of the text “enixa puerpera regem”), the choir performed the rest of the chant beginning from this point. Although this kind of performance would create a somewhat unwieldy form, it could work well from a practical perspective: the burden of the carol, like the portion of the chant to which it corresponds, closes on D, the same note on which the next phrase of the chant begins.

Another problem arises in attempting to understand the function of this carol: unlike many of the other carols, it does not concern any specific day of the year. Although several of the carols use the rubric *de Sancta Maria*, in fact, *Salve, sancta parens* has no rubric, thus giving no external indication of the occasion for its performance. The strong connections to the introit, however, point in the direction of performance at or preceding the Lady-Masses sung every
Saturday in the Lady Chapel—specifically those outside the Advent and Christmas seasons, since the introit *Salve, sancta parens* was only used between Purification and Advent.¹¹⁰

The plainchant connections in *Salve, sancta parens* may offer a key to understanding the purpose of other carols in honor of the Virgin in the Ritson Manuscript. The idea that this carol served the purpose of embellishing the Lady-Mass could point to similar uses for a carol like *Ave, decus seculi*, which occurs near *Salve, sancta parens* in the manuscript and shares its use of an exclusively Latin text. Unlike many of the carols addressing an earthly audience in a celebratory and admonitory fashion, these carols act as prayers of praise to a heavenly listener, and as a result their composers may have found no need to use the vernacular.

The second carol based on plainchant, *Te Deum laudamus: O blesse god in trinite*, (fols. 26v–27), bears some similarity to *Salve, sancta parens* in its fashion of incorporating the chant melody and text, although in other respects it does so in an entirely unique manner (Example 3). Its first burden opens with the upper voice alone as if intoning the piece; the tenor joins in only on the text “laudamus” (a technique that caused the scribe to omit the words “Te Deum” in the upper voice, since ordinarily the text is found only beneath the lower staff). Like *Salve, sancta parens*, this carol quotes the liturgical text literally—so much so that the text of the second burden is not written out at all: at the end of the first burden, a rubric reading “ffaburdon Te eternum” implies the continuation of the *Te Deum* text from the point where the first burden left off (“te Dominum confitemur”). Manfred Bukofzer interpreted this rubric as instruction to sing a portion of the *Te Deum* chant using fa-burden.¹¹¹ Miller and Stevens both suggested instead that the burden of the carol be repeated to the text “Te eternum” with an improvised middle voice in parallel thirds and fourths with the outer two. Although this voice cannot follow the upper voice

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¹¹⁰ Harrison, *Music in Medieval Britain*, 79.
literally without producing “a series of outlandish dissonances,” in Bukofzer’s words, Stevens argues that since fa-burden was an improvisatory technique this is no grave objection. In Stevens’s interpretation, what is remarkable is that the texts of the two burdens are distinct, as is the case for no other carol in the Ritson Manuscript. As in *Salve, sancta parens*, the verses of this carol do not come from the same text as the burden: instead, they celebrate the Incarnation in rhyming English verse:

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O blesse god in trinite,
grete cause have we to blesse thy name,
hat now woldest sende downe fro the,
the holy gost to stynte oure blame,
te deum laudamus.
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They do refer to the burden, however, with the concluding line “Te deum laudamus” in each verse.

**Example 3.** Triplex of carol *Te Deum*, burden and verse refrain; plainchant *Te Deum*

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*Te Deum laudamus: O blesse god* is somewhat easier to situate within a particular day of the year than *Salve, sancta parens*, due to its focus on the birth of Christ and the rubric *in

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112 Stevens, *Mediaeval Carols*, 121.
nativitate Domini, although many of the same questions about its specific placement arise. Despite its literal textual appropriation of the *Te Deum* chant, the carol includes only a small portion of the long text. It is thus hardly conceivable that it could have served as a polyphonic setting of the full chant. Nevertheless, the line of inquiry opened up by its textual and musical connections to the *Te Deum* chant and its associations with Christmas Day is worth pursuing.

The service of Matins, which concludes with the singing of the *Te Deum*, precedes the first Mass on Christmas Day. The *Te Deum* is thus the last music performed before the arrival of Christmas Day and the ceremonies that accompany it. If *Te Deum laudamus: O blesse god* did not replace the *Te Deum*, its resonances with the chant and acclamation of the Incarnation would make it an attractive piece for performance after the end of Matins and before Mass. The vernacular stanzas added to the liturgical text of the burdens would admirably suit such a context, when laymen would have gathered in large numbers to hear the first Mass of Christmas Day.

The last carol that includes melodic material from plainsong does so in an entirely different manner than the other two and is perhaps the most enigmatic of the three. *For all cristen saulys pray we* is the penultimate work in the collection of carols and incorporates the chant *Requiem aeternum* not in the highest voice but, according to a more antiquated style, in the lowest, the tenor (Example 4). For much of the carol, the tenor states the chant melody in semibreves without any of the elaboration found in *Salve, sancta parens* or *Te Deum laudamus: O blesse god*. This carol is one of the two that contains fusae, suggesting that its performance tempo should be slower than that of the others. The plainsong melody in semibreves would thus move fairly slowly, in the manner of a cantus firmus, even though the note values of the tenor are not consistently longer than those of the upper two voices.
Example 4. Tenor of Latin portions of carol *For all cristen saulys*; plainchant from *Liber Usualis*

The textual approach also differs dramatically from that taken in the other two carols: rather than juxtaposing a liturgically-based burden and a newly-written verse, *For all cristen saulys* intertwines the introit text with English additions in both burden and verse. It does, however, include the entire text (and melody) up to the point where the psalm verse would occur. Also unlike the other two carols, and indeed the vast majority of those in the Ritson Manuscript, *For all cristen saulys* has only one burden, which was presumably intended for choral performance because of its three-voice texture. At one point in the verse, a second three-voice section occurs, on the repetition of “et lux perpetua”; this one is clearly marked “chorus.” Although Stevens does not mark it as such in his edition, the long section in which the text “et lux perpetua luceat eis” recurs at the end of each verse functions in some ways as a second
burden (which in one instance, no. 116, *O blessed Lord*, follows rather than precedes the verse). The text in this refrain differs from that of the opening, just as the texts of the two burdens of the Te Deum carol.

Understanding the possible context for *For all cristen saulys* presents both special challenges and intriguing areas for inquiry. As a vicar choral, Smert would have been intimately acquainted with the mass for the dead, since one of the vicars’ main responsibilities was singing the memorial masses of those who had provided endowments for the purpose. This connection may go far toward explaining the unusual choice of subject matter for a carol and equally unusual plainchant basis for a polyphonic composition of any description.113 The text of the carol, however, expresses a desire to intercede on behalf not of an individual but of all the faithful departed. Moreover, the second verse identifies the carol specifically as a prayer offered without hope of monetary compensation:

> In aspeciall for the saulys þat han moste nede,  
> abydyng in the paynes of derkenesse,  
> weche han no socoure but almysdede:  
> et lux perpetua luceat eis.114

For these reasons, the carol would appear to fit most naturally into the feast of All Souls. The unique rubric *in fine nativitatis* offers little assistance in the inquiry, save perhaps in disproving this conclusion. Does it refer to the octave of Christmas, to the twelfth day, to Epiphany, to Purification? Miller gave her opinion in favor of the latter,115 although this interpretation goes no further than any other in explaining the connection between the *Requiem aeternum* chant and this feast day.

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113 Miller, “A Fifteenth Century Record of English Choir Repertory,” 57.  
114 London, BL Add. 5665 f. 51v.  
Although all three carols that draw on plainchant melodies do so in their own unique manner, several striking similarities in their use of liturgical text and music assist in drawing slightly broader conclusions about the use of the carols in the Ritson Manuscript. The texts of all three carols quote literally from the texts of their liturgical models, despite the lack of rhyme and meter in those texts, drawing attention to the fundamental distinctions between these textual borrowings and the kind explored in Greene’s *Early English Carols*, which consist of metrical plainchant lines and phrases easily incorporated within the carol, also a rhyming and metrical genre. But all three also contain further text unrelated to their liturgical sources. The liturgical portions address a heavenly listener in prayer, while the additional text provides commentary and elaboration for the edification of men.

Perhaps the most striking connection between these three carols is the relationship between all three and music that occurs at or near the beginning of Mass. Two draw on the melodies of introits, the first element of the Mass, and the other on the Te Deum, the last music that precedes it. Because of the incompleteness of the Latin texts and the presence, in two cases, of vernacular ones, these carols appear to have functioned not as substitutions within the Mass itself but as additions before it began. Such a performance context could apply to a number of the other carols in the manuscript, although they do not bear the marks of connections to a specific liturgical location.

While many aspects of the three carols discussed here and their performance remain obscure both on a broad and a detailed level, the connections to plainchant that they display allow us to form some reasonable hypotheses about these carols and ones like them in the Ritson Manuscript. The variety of techniques they use in incorporating plainchant and their unusual

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approach to Latin textual references also attest to the complexity of the fifteenth-century carol as a genre.

VII. Conclusion
The carols of the Ritson Manuscript present fascinating material for study, in part because many questions about the genre still remain unanswered. This thesis has sought largely to address the central question of performance contexts for the Ritson carols through gathering and assessing the available information about the manuscript and its contents, composers, and institution of origin. The manuscript provides examples of an important stage in the development of the carol as well as several unique features that did not become incorporated in the style of later carols. Equally significantly, the composers of these carols ensured that their names would survive with their compositions, making it possible to glean information about their lives and the interest they took in the genre. Perhaps more importantly for a discussion of performance contexts, the clear associations between the Ritson Manuscript and Exeter Cathedral bring several sources such as local medieval liturgical books to bear on the question. The music itself and the manner of its preservation in the book suggest compelling connections with parts of the liturgy.

While taking into account the theories presented in earlier scholarship, this study has approached the questions raised by an acquaintance with fifteenth-century carols in a more circumscribed manner, with the result that any conclusions reached apply to the practice in Exeter rather than throughout England. This comparatively narrow focus, although it rules out the possibility of addressing these questions in a broader fashion, has allowed evidence of various kinds to be weighed against that of a specific manuscript and ecclesiastical institution. The conclusions reached here still rest on many layers of inference, but they do account for the possibility that the use of carols varied extensively from one location to another.
Efforts to determine the use of the carols in any fifteenth-century collection inevitably reveal the heterogeneous nature of the genre, which presents impediments for attempts to generalize about performance contexts. Even within this one manuscript, it is difficult to imagine any single purpose that all forty-four carols could have served. Despite their uniformity of genre and inclusion in one book, the carols of the Ritson Manuscript vary widely enough in language and content to cause considerable difficulties for attempts to assign a single kind of use. A close look at the carols in this collection reveals nothing so much as the flexibility of the genre—a characteristic that could contribute to making it equally acceptable within several different contexts. Probably for this reason, scholars have always advanced theories to account for the performance contexts of many or most, but not all carols, even when they have done so with great conviction. But by coming to terms with this inherent flexibility, we may find that it also helps to explain the carol’s enormous popularity during this period.

In view of the idea that several different uses for carols may have existed side by side, this study has thus focused on and made some suggestions concerning sacred performance contexts for the carols of the Ritson Manuscript. In the absence of direct evidence for either sacred or secular performance of carols in fifteenth-century Exeter, it has appeared rewarding to pursue the line of inquiry suggested by the liturgical allusions in the manuscript. While firm conclusions about the use or uses of fifteenth-century carols continue to prove elusive, several aspects of the compositions in this collection provide suggestive details that point in the direction of performance outside—but just outside—the borders of the liturgy.
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