

The College Choir



The College Choir, c. 1900. Reference: PHOT/12/3/1900

Seated men, left to right

Unknown, Unknown, Rev. W. T. Southward (Dean, Tutor and Choirmaster), A. W. Spratt (Senior Tutor), Rev. J. N. Figgis, F. M. Rushmore, Unknown.

This is the earliest surviving photograph of the College choir within the Archive at St. Catharine's College. The choir appears to have been made up of Fellows, students, and choristers, though it is not known where the choristers came from. Unlike several other Colleges in Cambridge, St. Catharine's does not have a school attached.¹ It appears that many Colleges had choristers singing in their chapels at the start of the 20th century and the boys may have been the sons of those working in the Colleges or the sons of local Cambridge people. The choir may also have featured College servants, as non-academic support staff were then known. Attendance at Chapel was then compulsory and the choir was in fact semi-professional.

The majority of those featuring in the photograph are unfortunately unknown, but some of the gentlemen seated behind the choir boys seated on the ground have been identified and include some eminent figures from the College's history.

¹ King's College and St. John's both have schools attached and these provide choristers for the Chapel choirs.

William Southward came to St. Catharine's from Liverpool and studied Classics as an undergraduate. He went on to teach at Dulwich College, before returning to St. Catharine's as a Fellow in 1876; latterly becoming Tutor in 1892. He was described as having an excellent ear for tone and pitch and was seen as a good choirmaster.

Spratt too was a Classicist and went away to teach at Lancing College before returning as a Fellow in 1865. During his time as St. Catharine's he was variously Dean, Steward, Bursar, and Tutor. He was also a keen cricketer and sportsman and an accomplished musician with a love of Church music. He took an active role in the refurbishment of the College Chapel and the purchase of the new organ (built by Norman and Beard of Norwich), which at the time was one of the finest in Cambridge.

John Figgis was originally a mathematician, coming up to St. Catharine's in 1885 and gaining a first in 1888 before transferring to History where he also gained a first. He became an outstanding political theorist and theologian. However, his death was hastened after setting out for the USA in January 1918, only to have his ship torpedoed off County Antrim, Ireland. He never recovered from shock and died in 1919.²

The last of the identified men is F. M. Rushmore, who in 1900 was Second Master of the Perse School, Cambridge. He had come up to St. Catharine's in 1895 as a Choral Exhibitioner (i.e. with a music scholarship). He returned to St. Catharine's in 1907 as a Fellow, latterly becoming Junior Bursar, 1907-18; Senior Tutor and President, 1918-27; and finally the College's first lay Master, 1927-33. He is known to have been a baritone singer!

This photograph was given by the daughter of the third boy (Gane) from the left of the back row. Many of the documents now held in the Archive have been received from those with links to the College, but those without links also often give material related to the College. We are very grateful for all of these donations.

The Archivist is always pleased to answer questions about the College and its members. Enquiries should be directed to archivist@caths.cam.ac.uk, or call 01223 338343. The Archivist only works for the College on Thursdays and Fridays so there is sometimes a delay in being able to answer queries.

² Mark D. Chapman, 'Figgis, (John) Neville (1866–1919)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33126>, accessed 20 June 2014]