

The Tombland Riot
Prior Thomas tells of the year 1272 when the
spire and Cathedral burned down



Good day all, I am Prior Thomas. I am called the Prior because I am the head monk at Norwich Cathedral Priory.

Lots of us monks lived here a long time ago. **Do you know what a monk is?** Monks are men who pray to God every day and help people. We used to live here, together in a community and we worked hard caring for the cathedral and for everyone who came here. We prayed together seven times a day as our founder St Benedict asked us to.

One day one of my monks, Brother Philip, I think it was, came to see me in the Chapter House and told me that many people were banging on the gate outside. He said they were shouting and that they sounded very angry! I told him to ignore them. 'Perhaps they are just hungry' I said.

An hour later another monk came to me and told me that there was some smoke wafting over the Priory wall. He thought the people of the city had lit a fire.

I told him not to worry. 'Maybe they are cooking some fish on a fire' I said.

Then an hour later two monks came running to me and said that there was smoke coming through gaps in the ceiling in the Cathedral.

I told them to fetch our Sacrist, the monk who looks after everything in the Cathedral.

'Tell him to have a look up there' I said.

I thought I'd better walk over into the Cathedral to see what was going on. When I came through the door I could smell smoke. It was very cloudy and I started to cough! Lots of monks came running down the nave shouting: 'Quickly everyone must get out of here, everyone must get out. We're on fire, we're on fire!'

Suddenly there was a loud BANG and under the tower the wood exploded and sparks shot out everywhere, then some flames appeared and started to shoot around the whole tower. I heard a big crash. The spire had fallen down outside.

'Run everyone, run'' I shouted and began to follow the others out of the South door.

When we got outside the West front of the Cathedral I could see lots of men standing on top of the Priory wall firing burning arrows from bows. They had put cloth on the end of the arrows that was soaked in fuel and were lighting them then firing them towards the Cathedral roof and tower.



I shouted at them, 'Stop this, stop this at once, all of you'

'Well, you stop asking us to pay the church all that money' shouted back one man.

'Yes, stop making us pay tax' shouted another.

Arrows were flying everywhere so myself and the other monks ran back across the garden to the orchard where all our fruit trees were growing to hide there.

Once the tower had fallen down the fire was spreading across the whole roof. It was then that the people stopped firing arrows because soldiers from the castle were coming towards them.

We let them in through our gates and they started to get organised into long lines to bring water from the river. Our monks helped them put up ladders and they began to try and put the fire out. It took a long, long time.

It was too late to save our beautiful roof and tower. We knew that we would have to re-build it all.

All our lovely windows were spoiled too and our wall painting showing stories from the Bible were covered in soot from the smoke.

We all felt very sad that night. We went into the chapel at the back of the Cathedral and prayed. We thanked God that none of us had been hurt. Luckily all our precious Bibles in the Library were safe.

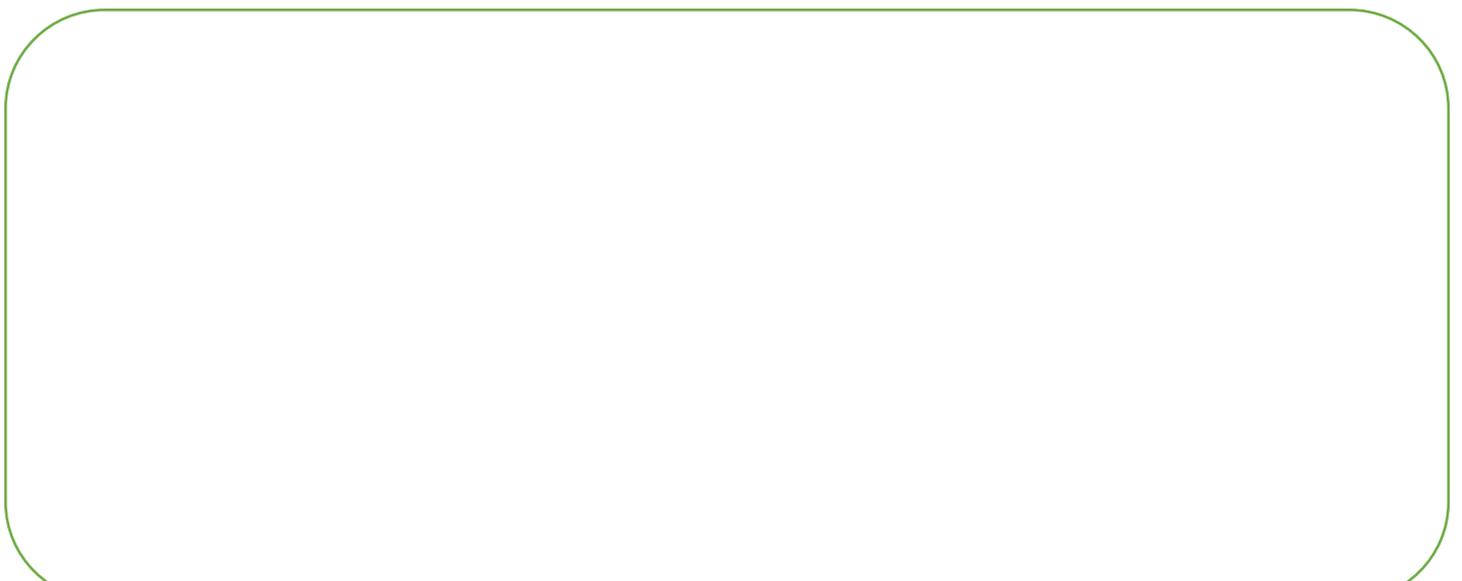
The next day I called a meeting with all the important people of the City to talk about how we might stop charging the people of Norwich taxes. I knew we had to be kinder to them from now on.

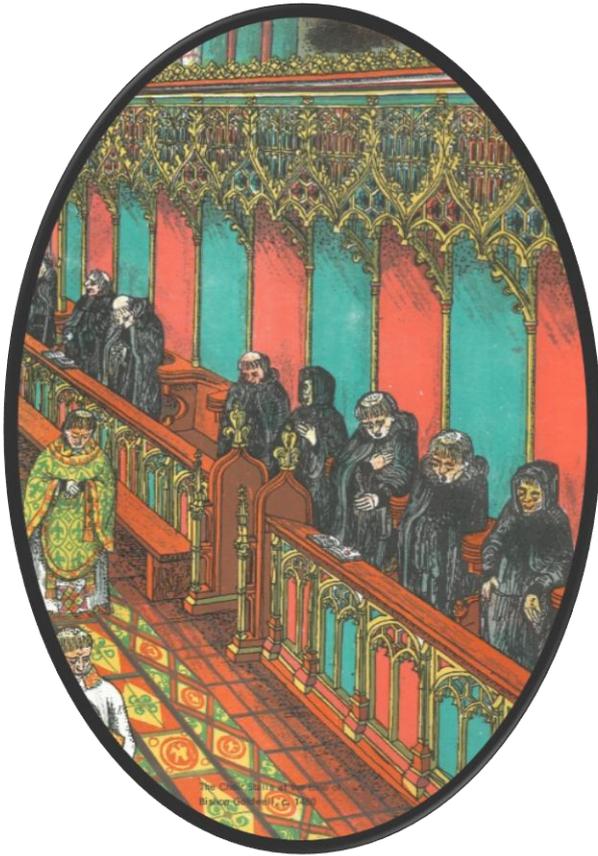
You see we'd been charging them these taxes to help us keep the Cathedral in good repair, but when I thought about it I realised that many of them were very poor.

It took a long time to repair and rebuild the Cathedral, but we got it done. I thank God each day for this special place where we can once more care for everyone who comes here and pray for them every day.

What do you think about what happened?

Can you draw a picture to show what happened in the fire?



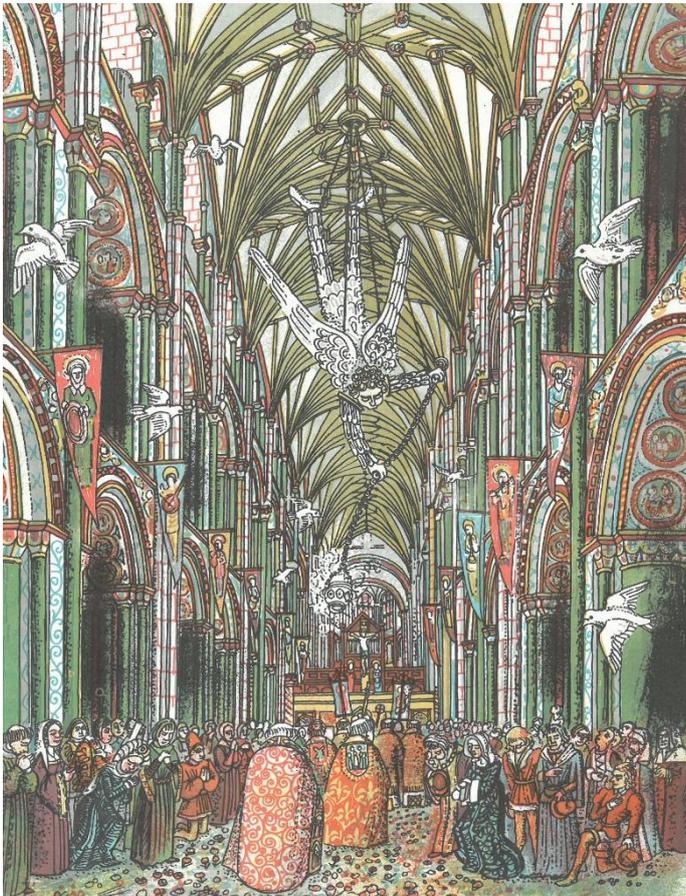


This is what it looked like in the Choir, before the fire, where the monks sang their prayers every day. The tower is near here.

Imagine how they felt when all the beautiful painting and decoration was burned.

Can you see the black, Benedictine habits the monks are all wearing?

One monk is wearing a special robe called a chasuble (this shows he is also a priest). He must be walking towards the High Altar to start the service of Holy Communion.



This the Cathedral nave back in medieval times, before the fire. It is the largest space where all the chairs are now.

Can you see the swinging, carved, wooden angel?

There is incense burning in a pot on a chain. It wafted scented smoke around to remind everyone that their prayers were rising up to God is heaven.

We have a new, wicker angel now that hangs in the same place at Christmas and Easter time.



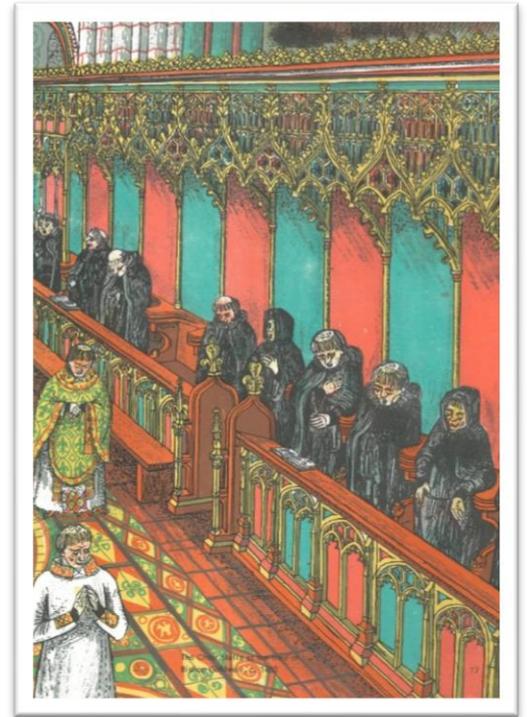


Here is the Choir now and next to it is the monks' picture again, long ago.

Look at the walls and the floor. How have they changed?

Look at the new ceiling.

When the Cathedral was repaired after the fire, a stone ceiling was carved.



Can you design some beautiful patterns around this box that could be painted on the stone walls and pillars in the Cathedral if we were asked to decorate it again?