Hereford Cathedral has a long history of literature and academic study and our Cloisters have also been home to many writers and poets over the years.

We have complied some of those poems for this Poetry Trail – some were written hundreds of years ago, while others were written just last year by our Young Poet in Residence.

Enjoy reading these texts and let them inspire you...
‘Next came we into a brave and ancient priviledg’d place ... the Collegde Cloyster where 12 of the singing men, all in orders, most of them Masters in Arts, of a Gentile garbe, have their convenient several dwellings ... wherein (after we had freely tasted all of their Choral cordiall Liquor) we spent our time till the Bell toll’d us away to Cathedral prayers.’

A description of the Cloisters, written by a soldier visiting the Cloisters in 1634.
I wonder what the floor used to look like
Back before it was just carpet.
Was it wood, was it concrete, was it sweet smelling pine – carefully and delicately varnished?
Was there beauty, was there fear in the ground that once lay?
Was there cold, or was there warmth, as if you could be okay?
Were these walls bare bricked, harsh and intimidating?
Or were they soft and gave the space for reflection and contemplating?

An extract from ‘I wonder what the floor looked like’ by Heidi Fassam, Young Poet in Residence for the Eastern Cloisters Project.
Miss Fortune’s not a fickle dame,
To Me, She’s evermore the same;
Smiling on Gamblers of the Town,
On me She casts a constant frown.
Her backward favours I must share
From ten at night till morning pray’r;

Extract of a piece written by Henry Hall (Vicar Choral 1679-1707)
about the effect of gambling on his fellow Vicars Choral!
And where a grey cathedral tower
Uprises broad and high,
A home is made in cloistral shade,
Beside the winding Wye.
To seek the richest boons for these,
Why should your heart be slow?
One Shepherd, Chief and Great and Good,
is watching there, I know.

Written by Frances Ridley Havergal (1836-1879) when visiting her brother, who was a Vicar Choral and lived in the Cloisters.
‘In Hereford dialect, ‘choir’ meant cathedral, ‘as in ‘going to choir’ meant going to a service at the cathedral.

There was a saying, from the time of the original Three Choirs Festival, that Gloucester is known for rank, Worcester for wealth, and Hereford for good music!

Francis Tebbs Haergal (Vicar Choral 1853-1874) was a keen historian as well as a vicar. He wrote a book called Herefordshire’s Words and Phrases which recorded phrases from the local dialect, to make sure they weren’t lost.
Twelve vicars choral, many years ago,  
Vested with hood and stole,  
Made a fine show.  
Twelve vicars choral, reduced to eleven,  
Passed away one by one,  
Until there were seven.  
Seven vicars choral, rather in a fix,  
One more departed,  
Then there were six.  

C. J. J.

Extract from a poem written on a piece of paper picked up in the Cathedral Close as some point in the 19th century. The C.J.J. almost certainly refers to Christopher Jay Jones. He was a Vicar Choral at Hereford from 1806 to 1853.
Bells ring.
A building stands tall.
I hope these bells continue to ring.
I hope these walls do not fall.

Beauty can be lost in an instant
But some memories cannot be forgotten
In a fragile existence the only constant
Is the path that will be trodden.

Bells ring.
A building stands tall.
And all that matters is that I hear them as they ring
For one day these walls will surely fall.

Why not use these poems as inspiration for your own piece about our Cloisters?

Or perhaps about your home instead?

We would love to see what you’ve written – we will be writing extracts from poems written on our in-person trail onto the leaves of our Story Nook tree, but if you share your poetry with us, your poem may end up on the tree too!