

## MUSIC & MORE ONLINE: JANUARY 2021

For members, past and present, of **BLACKBURN CATHEDRAL CHOIRS**  
and for all who relish, treasure and encourage **INSPIRATIONAL CATHEDRAL MUSIC.**

Editor: Dr John Bertalot, Organist Emeritus, Blackburn Cathedral

## BLACKBURN CATHEDRAL

### From Bishop Nicholas Reade:

Dear John,

Another brilliant issue of M & M, [December 2020] and most certainly not because of the first article!

I certainly warmly endorse Tom Daggett's comments about choirs and evangelism. That was indeed my experience in all the churches I served in and also in the wider ministry I was called to exercise. **If a parish invests time and energy in the music and choir, there is growth in devotion among the congregation, and new people arrive.** There are always those who are drawn to find GOD through music and good singing. It is encouraging to find how many come during the week when our services are sung, perhaps particularly at Evensong. None of this, of course is to say we should not also have 'Messy Church' and the many other seeker friendly services.

You were far too generous with the coverage you gave to me in this very fine Advent issue.

Many blessings!

Nicholas



### Something different:



Chopin

**JOHN ROBINSON** playing Chopin's Nocturne (*Night music*) Op. 27 number 1 in our darkened cathedral



<https://youtu.be/Zd2TG0gKScs?list=TLPQMTcxMTlwMjCZEPXeJ3Xm4Q>



Our former organ scholar, **JUSTIN MILLER**, continues to do great things at St. Matthew's Church, Northampton.

In a recent Newsletter he wrote about the young people in his choir during a lock-down: "Our learning did not stop. Every week 14 music lessons took place online, with nine choristers learning the piano, three learning the recorder, and most having singing lessons with our singing tutor..." "For the first time in the history of St.

Matthew's, the premier [of a commissioned work for choir and organ] was livestreamed and enjoyed by over one thousand people all over the world."

Here's Justin (in a mask, which had slipped) playing the demanding organ part for that commission:

*The magnificent world famous Walker organ was celebrating its 125<sup>th</sup> birthday! It has 3 Open Diapasons on the Great, and two real 32s on the pedal!*

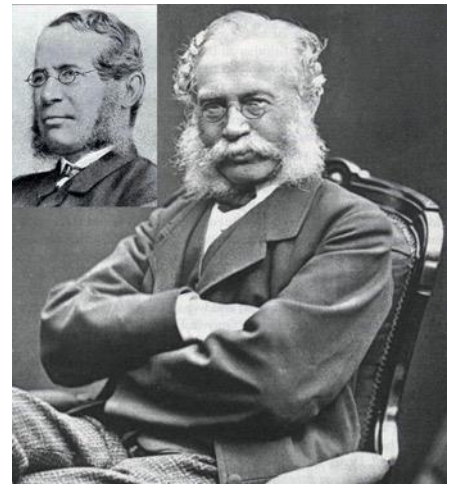






**JOHN ROBINSON** recently video-recorded a brilliant performance of **JB's Variations for pedals on Regent Square** - the famous hymn tune sung to **Light's abode** - by former Blackburn organist **HENRY SMART**.

Henry Smart was organist of Blackburn's Parish Church (i.e. the Nave of our present Cathedral) 1832-38 where he began to make a name for himself not only as an organist but also as a composer. He then moved to London where his career flourished!



English organs in those days had only recently introduced a pedal division (we were way behind Germany where Bach played superb 4 manual organs with equally large pedal divisions) and so most organ music in England was mainly 2 manuals only. Henry Smart led the way by composing organ music with important part for the pedals. **Here's an extract from Smart's March in G:**

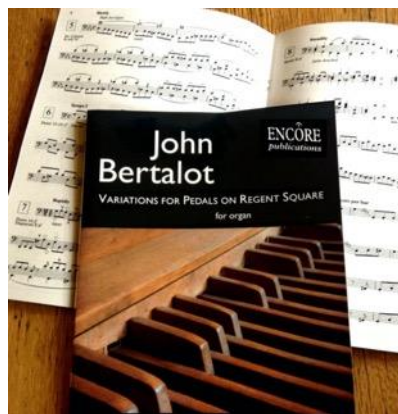
And so when **our brand new organ** was about to be dedicated (on **20<sup>th</sup> December, 1969**), JB, who was the cathedral organist and had raised all the money to purchase our organ, wanted to include music which had **Blackburn connections**.



So, amongst other works, JB chose Smart's well-known hymn tune

**Regent Square** and, because **Smart's organ music always had important parts for the pedals**, so JB wrote his **Variations on Regent Square for pedals only**, designed to demonstrate our magnificent pedal organ.

So here's **JOHN ROBINSON** playing the Variations **from memory!!** Make sure you're listening to them on **LARGE LOUDSPEAKERS** – for the sound is glorious!



Variation 1:



[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hle-IO\\_ncyq](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hle-IO_ncyq)

←Photo of the enlarged Pedal division inaugurated by consultant David Briggs, 2002





## From former chorister **CHRIS RYAN**

whose photo (R) as a chorister, (left) appeared in our November edition in **Stephen Rickerby's** (right) memories of his time as a chorister.



Hello again, John,

I trust that life is going well for you over there. I am always impressed by your inexhaustible enthusiasm and wish I had even half of your energy.....

I really want to tell you how much I continue to enjoy each and every issue of *Music & More* – long may it continue!

Naturally, I tend to be particularly drawn towards news of my contemporaries in the Boys' and Youth choirs, so the recent accounts by **John Marr**, **Stewart Hopkinson**, **Stephen Rickerby** and **William Heap**, in particular, were



Stewart Hopkinson transferring his Senior Old Chorister badge to John Marr, Choristers' Reunion 2006.

William Heap



fantastic reading for me. Their memories of specific services, music and events from the 1970s are rather more detailed than mine – but I must have been there so will enjoy the shared memory anyway! I actually appeared in a few of the recent photos – my teenage mop of bright red hair was unmissable [above] and came as a shock to my kids who are not used to me having any hair at all! I thought that (what I laughingly call) my career in paint factories, shipyards and on-board ships had

included a few risks along the way - but then I saw that photo of **Stephen Rickerby** hanging off an Ethiopian cliff face and was left humbled.

I was also delighted to hear news of **Bryan Lamb's 89th birthday**. I only ever met Bryan a few times at my very first Old Choristers' reunions at Whalley Abbey but the memories of him telling stories from his times in the choir and the RAF, washed down with some of my early experiences of beer, stay with me.

Sr. Old Chorister John Marr with Bryan Lamb 2006



Unfortunately, I can never make the Choristers' Annual Reunion and am now regretting not making sufficient effort to join the Zoom event recently organised by **Graham Chapelhow**. (I also remember his great piece in one of the last printed versions.) My apologies! I WILL get there one year in person – just make sure that nobody lets me anywhere near the choir stalls! As I described when I wrote a long piece for M&M a few of years ago, my musical talent was never great and once my voice broke it sank steadily through the choir sections until even singing the higher bass notes was a struggle. Of course, an inability even to read the bass clef also contributed to my difficulties!

As I described in that last piece, even though I did not carry forward either music or a Christian belief into my adult life, my time in the choirs had a tremendous influence on me. I still wonder how we ever managed to fit in so many practices and services but the discipline, enjoyment, fun and inspiration that period of my life far outweighed the perceived sacrifices and will stay with me forever. The world is very different in 2020 from when I joined the Boys' choir in 1973 but I would still recommend this to any boy, girl or parent who is considering it.



From a Prefects' Board in the Song School

Life continues to treat me and my family very well despite the special challenges that this year has brought. I have now lived in South-East Asia since 1991 (Singapore – Viet Nam – Singapore), meaning that I have actually spent more time based in Asia than the UK.

**Bee Ling** and I have been married for 24 years and our kids are growing up fast. **Magnus**, 17, did well at his 'O' levels last year and is now studying at Singapore Polytechnic where he actually seems to be taking an interest in his classes while **Jemima**, 13, survived the pressures of the national school exam last year and got into an excellent Secondary School. They have both had to study online for a period this year but now attend classes normally (although fully masked up).



Chris, Bee Ling, Magnus & Jemima

It is awful to hear how badly things are going with COVID in the UK – and especially in the Blackburn area. I almost feel guilty over how well things have been managed here by comparison. Singapore has suffered only 29 deaths out of a population of 5.5 million which is a remarkably low proportion compared to most western countries. But this has been earned the hard way – our “Circuit Breaker” lockdown measures have been strictly and consistently enforced for 8 months now with no stop-start relaxation and no tourist corridors. The authorities here do not mess around and hundreds of non-citizens who flouted the rules have been permanently deported, losing their livelihoods in the process.

Let's hope that the latest lockdown in the UK is taken more seriously than previously – and better enforced – so that families are able to get together in a meaningful way for a joyous Christmas.

Sadly, we had to cancel our UK holiday which we had planned for June, and Mom will not be able to make her annual visit this winter. Hopefully, we will be able to get to the UK in June 2021.

As I write this in early December, I am hoping that the latest lockdown in the UK is being taken more seriously than previously - and better enforced – so that families are able to get together in a meaningful way for a joyous, traditional Christmas.



The lockdown measures have actually brought our family even closer together than before. Despite their being teenagers, we try to treat our kids as if they were almost part of the family.

So we have spent a lot of time together playing games, cooking (and eating), binge-watching TV, doing craft projects, painting and decorating etc – and so we have been able to hunker down pretty comfortably.

We are fortunate in having a decent-sized apartment with very open and green **views over a river** and onto trees beyond so do not face the claustrophobic lockdown conditions that many people must be facing around the

world. Because of reduced human intervention, Nature has reclaimed some of that space and we are seeing an even greater variety of wildlife than normal with almost daily sightings of eagles, kingfishers, herons, woodpeckers, monitor lizards, otters and very occasionally a snake (we met a small cobra a few months ago).

Sports have been strictly limited, too, and we miss our regular badminton and football. I know that re-starting football at 57-y-o, while 5kg above my “fighting weight” is going to be tough but I had a minor foot operation a couple of months ago which I am (perhaps optimistically) hoping will help to give me an extra yard of pace! Besides, my team lost 8-0 in our last 11-a-side game before lockdown (horribly against Magnus’ team!) so I am certainly not going to retire on that!

Each time I write to you, I revive many good memories from my youth and I thank you again for all the great experiences and life lessons learned.

Let's hope that we can meet again before too long.  
All the very best,

**Chris Ryan**



**Thank you for these wonderful memories, Chris,**

**and also for sharing some of the many joys of your delightful family in Singapore.**

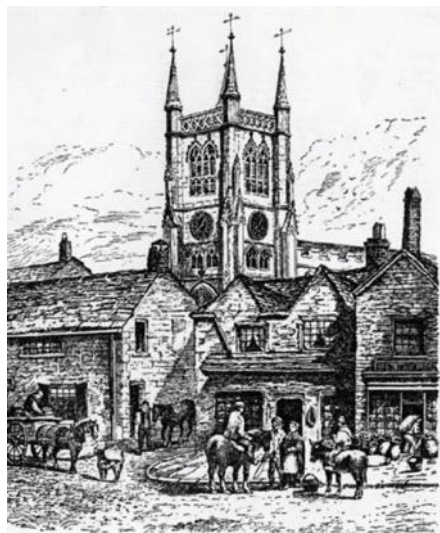
**How well I remember you and your elder brother, Mike as choristers, walking two miles to the cathedral on Sunday mornings because there was no bus. That's dedication! But I drove you home afterwards. And it's good to have Mike here in Lancashire – having enjoyed a distinguished career as a senior teacher at Lancaster Royal Grammar School. Your memories are a rich blessing to all who remember you, and especially to me.**

**THANK YOU! JB**



## WHO WAS THE FIRST ORGANIST IN THE NEW (1826) BLACKBURN PARISH CHURCH OF ST. MARY?

Having failed to appoint **S. S. Wesley** as the first organist of our new Parish Church in 1826 (which is the Nave of our present Cathedral – for the Vicar had said that, at the age of 17, Wesley was too young ‘to exercise great control over grown up singers who have to be cured of many bad habits’), the Vicar of Blackburn, Dr. Whittaker, appointed **Joseph John Harris**, who must have done a good job because, after only five years here, he went to Manchester Parish Church, which also became a Cathedral.



Our 1826 church from Darwen Street in 1840s, just below the present *Postal Order* pub, which was until about 40 years ago our main Post Office (thus its name!). **Kathleen Ferrier** worked there as a telephonist before she was ‘discovered’ by Sir Malcolm Sargent and Benjamin Britten.

But our second organist was destined for greater things than Mr Harris. He was **HENRY SMART** who was only 19 when he came to us from London – so presumably Harris had cured the choirmen of their bad habits! Smart’s father was a music publisher in London, and his uncle, Sir George Smart, was organist of St. George’s Chapel, Windsor Castle.

Smart was a composer who could write a good tune. We all know hymn tunes by him: *Regent Square* – *Light’s abode*,

*Misericordia* – *Just as I am*, *Heathlands* – *God of mercy*, *Everton* – *Son of God, eternal Saviour*, and many more. Music historians regard Smart’s hymn-tunes as “influencing the harmonic structure of subsequent English hymn-tunes, just as Bach’s harmonizations did for the German chorale 100 years earlier”. That’s high praise indeed!

And he also wrote tuneful music for the organ – which was ahead of its time, for he composed really interesting pedal parts. Why were these ahead of their time? Because playing with one’s feet had only recently come into vogue in England. (The UK was several centuries behind the Continent, where enormous organs had many superb pedal stops.) Continental organs were generally splattered over the West walls of their great churches and cathedrals, and were marvels of artistic and mechanical perfection.



Even our own new 1826 organ – which had 3 manuals – had only one set of ‘18 actual Double Open Diapason pipes’ from GGG to C, the lowest pipe being 24 by 22 inches in diameter. *It must have been very loud indeed!*

But compare that with our present organ which has not *one*, but *eighteen* separate stops, to be played on a pedal board with not just 18 pedal keys, but 32.

So Smart’s work in composing really interesting and demanding music for the feet encouraged English organ builders to begin to create organs with an increasing number of pedal stops, and with more notes as well.

**Henry Smart also had a wonderful sense of humour.** This is shown in a letter he wrote to the Vicar of Blackburn ten years after he had left us to take up a succession of appointments in London churches. The Vicar of Blackburn had just sacked his organist, William Robinson, who seemed to have had an alcohol problem, and so he was looking for a new organist and asked Smart for his advice.

Smart wrote in his letter dated 2<sup>nd</sup> November, 1848, from his home at 4, Regent’s Park Terrace, which begins by telling the Vicar, in 1½ pages, why he was so late in replying to the Vicar’s request for help:

London  
4. Regent's Park Terrace  
2<sup>nd</sup> November 1848

Revd. and Dear Sir

After circum-  
-gyrations such as are known only to  
those blessed with a penny-postal  
system, your letter has reached me.  
Having been counter-marched to Black-  
burn, and re-dispatched to London, it  
lay – I know not how long – in the counting  
house of our senior church-warden, who,  
meanwhile, was valetudinarianizing

“Rev’d. and Dear Sir, After circumgyrations such as are known only to those blessed with a penny-postal system, [introduced only eight years earlier] your letter has reached me. Having been counter-marched, and re-dispatched to London, it lay – I know not how long – in the country house of our senior church-warden, who, meanwhile, was valetudinarianizing\* at Margate; and he, being returned, could not expedite the matter further than by sending it to his official junior, whom he suspected of a knowledge not possessed by himself – namely of my address.



“In one sense, I am the reverse of the man who “awoke one morning and found himself famous” ; for I have really

believed myself to be almost as well known (and, I trust, fully as well liked) as the National Gallery : whereas the case seems to be that despite the existence of Directories, and a pretty tolerable amount of practice had and enjoyed by the postman at my street door, the “authorities” preferred opening and returning your letter “to the writer, for reasons assigned thereon” to the comparatively short cut of endeavouring to penetrate my obscurity.

“I am truly sorry to hear of the difficulty in which you are placed about an Organist; although, from what I have heard about Robinson, I am not surprised that brain-fever, or any disease to which brandy-and-water could give a helping-hand, should have been its cause. Neither can I deem his loss an irreparable breach in the current of musical art, though to supply his place for your purposes may perhaps, be a temporary difficulty.



On this point, however, I can offer you two suggestions.

“Firstly, I have with me an articulated pupil whose organ-playing and general ability I can most strongly commend, whose disposition and conduct are unimpeachable, whose time of bondage will expire soon after Christmas, and who, being a native of Bolton and thither returnable, is of course prepared for a country life. If you could keep the keys of the Blackburn organ for him until the time I have mentioned, I am sure he would in every way suit you.

“Much, however, would depend on the prospects held out to him, as to salary and probabilities of professional employment as a teacher. In this particular he would really be a great acquisition to Blackburn and its neighbourhood, as his performance on, and knowledge of, the pianoforte, are of a very superior order. He is quite young and I do not think his expectations would be by any means extravagant.

*[Alas, Smart did not give the name of his pupil.]*

“My second suggestion is that you should offer the situation to Mr. Greaves of Preston; who plays extremely well, is a very quiet, gentlemanly, unobtrusive person, and would, I believe, very gladly undertake the duty.

“There is, however, one small impediment.

“Some time since, he, Mr. Greaves, was, or fancied himself, much ill-used by the Vicar of Preston; and having, as I suppose, a Baconian habit of reasoning from particulars to universals, took it in dudgeon against the whole church, and joined himself unto Baal-Peor, – namely **the Lune Street connexion of Methodists.**”



*Lune Street in Preston is a few hundred yards West of Preston Train Station. The Methodist Church is a fine building halfway down that street on the left.*

con. of the matter.

“Now this kind of skin-deep perversion I take to be as easily subdued as it was induced; - but this for your better means of judgment, I give you the pro, and

Greaves is a good player and a highly respectable man, with but – as I think – just such cob-webs of the Conventicle\*\* about his feet as a single vigorous application of the brush would suffice to clear him from.

“Your difficulty has, however, brought me pleasure – that of hearing once more from you, and thus renewing – on paper at least – an intercourse to which I do not cease to look as one of the happiest passages of my life.

“Were it not for certain sterling (sic) reasons I should be most strongly tempted by pleasant remembrances to offer myself for your vacant appointment. But I now have four children – to say nothing of contingencies, and though pleasure be, in some respects, less, money is, in all respects, more, – which economically (sic) settles the question.

“I and Mrs. Smart were in North Wales this past summer, and have planned to visit the Lakes next year. Should this occur, we shall not fail to take Blackburn in our way for the pleasure of passing a day with you and Mrs. Whittaker, to whom I beg my kindest and most respectful remembrances.

“Trusting to hear in reply at your early convenience,  
Believe me, Revd. & dear Sir,  
very sincerely yours

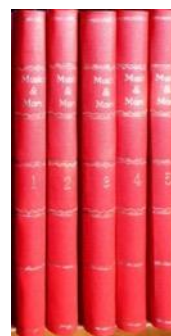
\***valetudinarianizing**: Recovering from ill-health.

\*\* **Conventicle**: A person who enjoys meetings – especially Nonconformist religious ones.

*We thank the Lancashire Archives Service Manager, Mrs Jacqui Crosby, for her kind permission to reproduce some of the archives of Blackburn Parish Church, ref. PR 3073/2/43 & 44.*

This article was first printed in M&M 2011.

**Handsomely bound copies of printed M&Ms may be enjoyed in the Cathedral's Library.**



**Heartiest congratulations to our BCCA Treasurer, JOHN MARR, on becoming an 'instant grandfather'. John wrote on Dec. 18:** My wife Angela's daughter (Caroline) has given birth to a little baby boy in the early hours of this morning: weighing in at a healthy 8lbs 4oz.  
**Heartiest congratulations to Grandma Angela, too!**



# THE JOYS OF BEING A CATHEDRAL CHORISTER

by **Edward Denham**



I was blessed I suppose with a good singing voice which was discovered by my music teacher Mr Seymour at St Wilfrid's High School in Blackburn, where I sang in the School choir.

Mr Seymour was friends with John Bertalot who was organist and choirmaster at Blackburn Cathedral at that time. I presumed that anyone who sang in the school choir but who showed potential might be considered by Mr Bertalot for the Cathedral choir. This in turn led to an offer of audition by way of letter to the potential candidates' parents, I can remember my parents' pleasure at receiving such a letter, and a date was duly arranged for the audition which would be held in the Song School at the Cathedral. I remember feeling nervous. However Mr Bertalot, or "JB" as he was known, soon put me at ease and I felt more relaxed about what lay ahead. This it transpired was quite straight forward, a verse or two of "There is a green hill far away", some scales, maybe another hymn and then it was all over, Mr Bertalot explained to my parents that he would write to them informing them of his decision.

To the delight of everyone concerned I was accepted into the choir as a probationer. Hence started my amazing journey which I recall on a daily basis and certainly one I shall never forget.



Edward at John Marr's fairly recent wedding. They were contemporaries in the cathedral choir

During my years as a chorister I was fortunate enough to have some very memorable experiences. I travelled to



Holland and North Germany twice on recital tours, where we stayed as guests with some lovely Dutch and German families. We sang in wonderful locations and even made a recording for Hilversum radio, a famous Dutch radio station. I was lucky enough to meet and sing with some very talented people including Ivor Bolton who is now a world famous orchestral conductor. I sang in some wonderfully inspiring services at the Cathedral including BBC TV's "Songs of Praise".

More importantly though I made some lifelong friends, whom I know would say the same about the choir and what it meant to them, the pride and joy of being able to sing in such an amazing setting and belong to a unique team of fellow choristers!

← OCs David Smalley, Allan Holden, Edward Denham and Eric Bancroft about to present the offering at the Choristers' Reunion Eucharist, September 2018

Speaking of teams, when I was in the choir we used to play endless games of football on the grass in the Cathedral Close (next to JB's house) which is now covered in new cathedral buildings and concrete! There were some memorable pranks too!

To be a chorister in a choir is and always will be a very special privilege, one which you may not appreciate at the time but certainly, when you look back, you know how blessed you were to be part of.

To have been associated with a tradition that dates back hundreds of years, linked to great choirs across the country, to sing in so many magnificent Cathedrals and civic buildings and experience spine tingling anthems and organ voluntaries which shook the ground on which you stood... these are the experiences that await you in the Cathedral choir family.

Now, as a Paramedic in the Welsh Ambulance Service covering large areas of rural mid Wales I often think back to my days in the Cathedral choir and equate what I learnt then to what I do now; I see life from the beginning to the end and all that lies between.



I am helped and comforted by my religious education I received through membership of such an amazing and inspiring institution.

The peace and quiet of prayers, the noisy background drone of traffic outside the Cathedral during Evensong whilst peace enveloped all inside, the loud organ playing the "voluntary" at the end of the service.

All these memories and so many more I treasure every day and make me so very grateful that I became a Cathedral Chorister. If you are lucky enough, as I was, to have that opportunity, take it, for you will not regret it for one single moment.

Thank you, Edward, not only for your happy memories of the cathedral choir, but also for your life-saving career in these troublesome times, which must bring comfort and healing to so many people.



## From a TL Duerden former chorister, **Roderick Hamm**

Sheila and I are now 91. I seem to be in reasonable nick but poor distance vision prevents me driving. So age and decrepitude are upon us and make it easier to comply with the Covid rules.

Apart, therefore, from housework and reading, **my pleasurable occupation is creating the cartoons** for the Wainwright Society's quarterly magazine. *(The Wainwright Society (founded 2002) keeps alive the fell-walking traditions promoted by Alfred Wainwright through his guidebooks and other publications.)*

I also create cartoons for a group of beaglers in the Midlands and the magazine of *Probus*. *(Probus Clubs are for retired or semi-retired people from all walks of life.)*

I paint for my own pleasure. Oh and a few cartoons etc to provoke donations for the NHS and St Catherine's Hospice. *(St Catherine's cares for patients and families across Chorley, Preston and South Ribble who are affected by life-shortening conditions like cancer, motor neurone disease and heart failure.)*

For example, I had been asked to illustrate a short account by a member of the Beagle support group about difficulties encountered when folk become disoriented and separated from the others and trying an unfamiliar cross country route as evening was fast approaching, **barbed wire and dense hedges had to be overcome**. They eventually got home but had had an adventure.



**The point was that the two women were well known to the membership.**



It was interesting to see the photos on your M&M magazine and to spot my brother in law **David Robinson** (subsequently **Archdeacon** of Lancaster, *on the left of Mr. Duerden*) among TLD's 1942 choristers. I must have been out of shot on that occasion.

Your M&M is a remarkable means of spanning the years and keeping the memories alive as well as providing a wealth of information. It is greatly appreciated by all its readers. Well done!

So, keep well and continue the good work.

**Rod.**

**(Left) Rod's 2020 hand-painted Christmas card**



Mr Hamm Sr. constantly drew and painted, so Rod followed suit, essentially self-taught but with the odd evening classes and membership of artists' groups, including chairmanship of **New Longton Artists**.

**Rod has led a very full and successful life. Clearly he's not slowing down!!**

**Rod is a barrister**, called by Lincoln's Inn, having an MA in law @ Cambridge (Queens' College) resulting in a career in legal sections of local authorities: Sunderland, Derby, East Riding, Salford, Failsworth, and **South Ribble** where he was **Town Clerk / Chief Executive**.

**His father had been Blackburn's Borough Treasurer.**







From last season's choral scholar, **DANIEL HICKS**  
(former chorister at York Minster)

Dear JB,

Thanks so much for your email – it's wonderful to hear from you as always, and I hope you've been keeping well and staving off boredom during this most recent national lockdown!

The headline news from me is that I have deferred my place at Durham University for another year. While the provision by the Music Faculty was superlative under the current circumstances, and everyone I met in College was lovely and welcoming, the realities of university life under COVID restrictions were such that I decided **I would be best served by deferring my place, and restarting my degree next academic year.** Among other things, I was unable to access any music practice rooms for the entire time I was in Durham, so I could only practise in my college room; this meant singing was more or less okay (provided I checked none of my neighbours were attending an online lecture at the time), but I didn't have sufficient room to practise my 'cello without moving my bed, and obviously I had no access to a piano at all. My decision has, I think, been validated by the subsequent introduction of the 'tier system', the second national lockdown and, most recently, the uncertainty about whether and when students will be allowed to return to university campus for next term.



All this aside, **I'm now back home** and finding ways to make this unexpected second gap year as productive and enjoyable as my time in Blackburn. Next week, **I start a new job as one of the Choir Chaperones at York Minster**, which involves supervising the choristers on their walk from school to the cathedral, and during



rehearsals and services (essentially doing what **Helen Davies** does so well in Blackburn).

I will be combining this with some voluntary work in the Music Departments at St Peter's School, the Minster's choir school which I attended, hopefully working with a range of age groups and in various capacities; and I am also teaching some singing lessons over Zoom, mostly preparing potential choristers for upcoming auditions.

I look forward to being in touch again in a few months' time once I've settled into the rhythm of my new job and life has generally calmed down a bit!

With every good wish, **Dan**

**If you're still in the festive spirit**

Enjoy **GORDON STEWART's** Christmas recital from Huddersfield Town Hall

where he has presided, almost weekly, at the Father Willis organ for exactly 30 years!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g4uu7UYBNP0&feature=youtu.be>



Our warmest congratulations and best wishes to

**JOAN BANKS**

who celebrates her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday on January 10<sup>th</sup>.

Joan, as many of us know, has been a regular member of our congregation for many years.

Her husband, **Keith** was a lay Canon and her two sons, **Peter** and **Ian** were most faithful choristers in the 1970s.

Peter is now into high finance in London, and Ian is a doctor, married to a doctor in Australia.



1945 **Alan D. Holden**

*From a Prefects' Board in the Song School*

We were sorry to learn that former chorister, **ALLAN HOLDEN** had suffered a fall at home in mid December, and was admitted to Bolton Hospital - where he is 'doing OK'. We send best wishes to Arlene, and to Allan for a speedy recovery so that they may enjoy a Happy and Healthy New Year.

## NEIL SHEPHERD R.I.P.

It is with the deepest sadness that we learned of the sudden death of former choir parent, NEIL SHEPHERD who was only 55. Neil was a Blackburn Cathedral choir parent 15 years ago: he was a big man in every sense – physically imposing, with a strong, most generous personality – a natural leader. When you were with Neil, things always ‘happened’.



For example, some years ago the printing costs of *Music & More* were getting out of hand, (over £1,000 per edition plus postage, twice a year) and so the editor suggested to the Blackburn Cathedral Choristers' Association that they might support *M&M* financially by creating Patrons (at £50 per year) and Grand Patrons (at £100 a year). Very quickly many generous members of BCCA joined this scheme, but **Neil Shepherd** became the Grandest Patron by contributing £150 per year, plus Gift aid (= £187.50p p.a). That's the sort of person Neil was.

And so, as a tribute to Neil **who, with his family later moved from Lancashire to the West of England** where he continued forming and conducting great choirs, here's a letter from Neil which appeared in the May 2007 edition of *Music & More*.

“Greetings! I hope that you remember me from Keynsham Parish Church when you came to stay with us and do a choral workshop? – Life has moved on. I was “promoted” (!) and spent 5 years as D of M at Cirencester PC which was great. But Kate and I decided to relocate back up North last summer. We're living in Clitheroe, and I'm now Organist and D of M at Standish where I gather, you were involved in the plans for the new Walker organ around 35 years ago. I thought that I'd make contact and say “hello” again.

*The family relaxes before Sunday lunch, after which Emily went to a fancy dress party! Matthew was away at college.*

“The children love it up here and Emily (6) is singing in the Children's choir at the Cathedral and loving every minute of it – and Leanne has joined the YPC! Lucy (4) can't wait until she is old enough to join the children's choir, too!

“Cirencester was an (almost) full time post with three choirs and lot of other things happening – I miss it immensely, but funnily enough, I get just as much out of my post at Standish with a smaller set-up. I'm in the process of extending my “*Schola Cantorum South*” by forming a new choir based here in the North – a choir which mainly exists to do occasional cathedral visits and go out into churches where they have little or no music making. Lots to keep me occupied.

“Day job wise, I had a career change recently and I'm now Area manager for a company of travel agents with branches in Langho, Great Harwood and Colne. We also have a call centre specializing in trips to Russia, the Baltics and former eastern bloc countries – now a booming section of the travel industry.

**“I'm in the process of organizing the Cathedral Choir tour to Paris [led by Richard Tanner] taking place from 31st May to 4th June, when the choir will be singing Mass at Notre-Dame de Paris (as well as visiting Euro Disney, and sailing on the Seine!!). I'm also seriously considering becoming a member of the Renaissance Singers again!”**

**Kate told your editor, during a delicious Sunday lunch:** ‘Blackburn Cathedral is a very friendly place. When I sat in the audience for the *Christmas Spectacular* several choir parents came to welcome me. I am thrilled that our three daughters will become members of the cathedral's ambitious and rewarding music programme.’



**In recent years Neil and his family have been living in Cornwall. A member of one of his choirs wrote:**

“Neil had such an indomitable spirit and passion for music and singing, and devoted his whole life to his music and his choirs. His legacy is enormous for he touched so many lives by bringing together choirs in communities which makes such a huge difference to people's lives.”

**Click ‘Abide’ (below) to hear the anthem which was sung at Neil's Funeral in Truro Cathedral. It's safe.**

**ABIDE**

**Death is not the end of life, it is the  
CULMINATION!**



**Dear Neil, may you now be singing with the angels – every memory of you is blessed.**



**FROM FORMER CHORISTER CLARA SLATER, now a second year student at Bristol University**

I have just been waiting for some rather exciting news which I was hoping to share with you.



The University has been certainly rather different this term, with no orchestra rehearsals, society socials or in-person lectures. I know the majority of students (both at schools and university) are certainly finding difficulty in adapting to this change in working style.

My course, Geography, is quite a computer-heavy one, with units in statistical coding and GIS programming (plotting maps using software), so at least I am fortunate in the sense that I still can continue with these virtually/online to keep students and staff safe.

I have been employed by 'Nomad Travel' - a travel vaccinations business, which is currently specialising in private Covid tests for those who need them to travel. I have really appreciated having somewhere to go every Saturday, to take a break from being 'locked down' this month. I

am really enjoying working there as my co-workers are fantastic and it's a geography-based job!

The good news which I am thrilled to tell you about is that I have been accepted by **the University of Washington in Seattle** to begin a year of study in September as part of my degree in Bristol. I cannot wait!

I hope you are keeping well and staying safe. Warm regards, Clara

**Heartiest congratulations, Clara. We're all thrilled for you.**

When you are in Seattle be sure to go up the 605ft high **Space Needle** (see my photo R. above) with a revolving restaurant (you have to book online for the lift, and also to dine).

Also, visit **St. Mark's Cathedral** at 9.00pm on Sundays for **Compline** sung by the cathedral choir in **semi darkness**, which is attended by very many students who tend to lie on the floor.

I did that many years ago and have never forgotten it.

**Roy Massey** and JB saw St. Mark's superb Flentrop organ being built in Holland in 1964.



**From the Fulwell brothers who were both outstanding Head Choristers here:**

**OLLIE:**



I have just completed my first term at the University of York and it's been quite an experience.

From moving into my flat of 21 students from all over the world to catching the coronavirus with these people two weeks later, it's been quite a rollercoaster!

Nevertheless, I have still had plenty of opportunities to make music, both virtually and in person (socially distanced of course!). Most notable was my invitation to join **The 24** one of the UK's top professional vocal ensembles. directed by Robert Hollingworth; we have been learning Frank Martin's Mass for 2 Choirs. Hopefully the new year will bring more opportunities, and perhaps the chance to perform in front of a proper audience again!



Ollie also plays the Trombone – rather well!!



**LEO:** *Currently a member of our Young People's Choir*

It's been a strange term at sixth form, with an increasingly smaller number of us in the building as term went on. I seemed to be pretty much the last one standing without having to be sent home, but my friendship group finally succumbed to Covid and I've been in isolation for the last week.

Covid has also made my time tricky at Junior RNCM where I study **voice** and the **Euphonium**. There was no face-to-face teaching at all from March to September, and we all missed out on lots of opportunities to perform.

Some face-to-face teaching has now resumed, and we have set up some small groups, but I really miss the large ensemble work and I hope that those can restart somehow before I finish there in the summer.



As reported in a recent M&M, the next academic year is full of bright promise for Leo, who has won a choral scholarship to **Hereford Cathedral** (where his brother, **Ollie**, held a similar scholarship).



**Yes! You've read what singing in a Blackburn Cathedral Choir meant to past choristers, pages 3-4 and 7, so now it's your turn:**

**Come and join our cathedral choirs – boys, girls, teens and men & women!**

**Contact our Director of Music, JOHN ROBINSON**

[John.Robinson@blackburncathedral.co.uk](mailto:John.Robinson@blackburncathedral.co.uk)



**Why hasn't my news appeared in M&M ? – not even a photograph!**

**Because you haven't sent it to the editor who relies almost entirely upon what folk send him!**

[John.bertalot@gmail.com](mailto:John.bertalot@gmail.com)

**A former choirman (who has since moved away) wrote to the editor, for he misses us so much:**

"I've been keeping up to date with M&M. It's a really good way to keep in touch with the community during these strange times, particularly whilst I am away.

**"Not a day goes without thinking of our Cathedral.** It has been such an important part of my life for over a decade now. Once the current unpleasantness ends and the Cathedral is able to function well, then the fellowship of music-making and good liturgy will be the tie that binds our community together once again."



**Hear, hear, dear singer – and thanks for all that you did for us during those most happy years.**





It was, with real sadness, that we learned from Canon Michael Wedgeworth that **SHEILA SHAW (widow of GORDON ) is now in a nursing home...**

...for, before COVID hit us, we saw Sheila so frequently at the Wednesday lunchtime organ recitals as well as on Sunday mornings for the Cathedral Choral Eucharists. But life has changed for us all.

Canon Wedgeworth wrote: *"We hear that **Sheila Shaw** has moved to a care home. We are providing her address, with the family's approval, so that anyone who wishes can send her a Christmas card, which we know she would really appreciate. The more **colourful**, the better."*

**Pendle Brook, 2 Haworth Street, Oswaldtwistle, BB5 3EA**

Many of us will remember the joy that Sheila and Gordon brought to so very many of us. **Their home in Mellor** (with an enormous garden) was often the place where parties were held for the Renaissance Singers, or for the Choirs' Association, or just for friends, of whom there were very many.

**They were such a fun couple:** here's Gordon dressed as Captain Mainwearing ('mannering') for one of the Singers' parties



Gordon was not only a lively member of the Renaissance Singers, but also a long-time member of the cathedral men's choir. Here he is receiving his long-service certificate from **Bishop Nicholas**.

Gordon and Sheila's two sons, **David** and **John**, were keen JB choristers: they and their sister provided Sheila and Gordon with **EIGHT GRAND DAUGHTERS!**



Theirs was a marriage made in heaven – and they shared their love with their very many friends – and especially those of us who were privileged to know and love them at Blackburn Cathedral.



Dear Sheila, may your memories of Gordon, of fun, of love and of great friendships, ever bless and comfort you now, for you have indeed blessed all of us.



## The Hunwick family appear pretty regularly in the pages of *Music & More*

This time **it was Geraldine's turn** (Phil Hunwick's daughter in law) who appeared on **BBCTV1** in a December programme about how Christmas is celebrated at a number of places in the North of England.



The Christmas-anticipating programme began with a demonstration how **WENSLEYDALE CHEESE** was made (to be eaten with Christmas fruit cake).

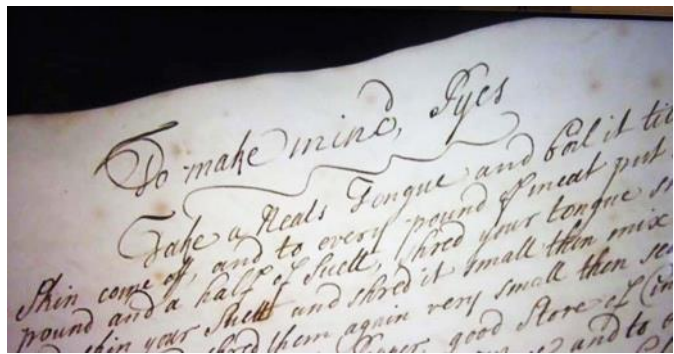
*Wensleydale cheese was first made by French Cistercian monks from the Roquefort region, who had settled in Wensleydale. They brought with them a recipe for making cheese from sheep's milk. It takes six weeks to mature!*



Then via Antony Gormley's enormous **ANGEL OF THE NORTH**, which is 20 metres high and 54 metres wide...

...we came to **NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY** where **GERALDINE HUNWICK** is **Senior Archivist**.

Geraldine showed us a 1733 manuscript with a recipe for delicious **MINCEd PYES**.



And while all this was going on Geraldine's husband (former Blackburn Cathedral chorister **CHRIS HUNWICK**, who is **archivist to the Duke of Northumberland at Alnwick Castle**) was with his dad, former chairman **PHIL**, going through Phil's house in Huddlesden prior to Phil moving to Northumberland in the New Year to be near **Chris, Geraldine, Miranda and William**.

**Phil and Chris dropped by Mellor en route for Northumberland, to say farewell to your Editor.**



We shall miss Phil and his growing family tremendously but wish him **very** well in his new life.

**See Phil's moving memories of Blackburn in our February edition.**



**Geraldine and Chris at Alnwick Castle**





**JOHN ROBINSON** plans to make a special recording on our fine cathedral organ this month to celebrate its 50<sup>th</sup> birthday...

(Actually its 51<sup>st</sup> birthday, for it was dedicated on 20<sup>th</sup> December 1969. The Covid situation put a stop to previous 50<sup>th</sup> plans).

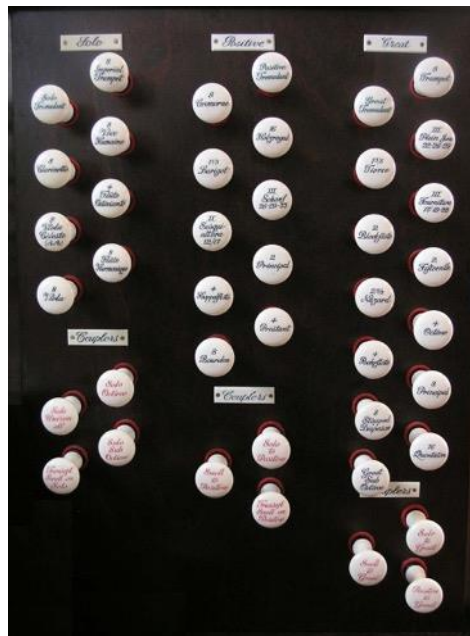
...with music composed in significant years for Blackburn Cathedral:

1926: Percy Whitlock's Sonata

1969: Jonathan Harvey's *Laus Deo*

2002: Francis Potts' *Introduction, Toccata and Fugue*

1969: John Bertalot's *Pedal Variations on Regent Square*. Composed and played for the organ's opening on 20 December 1969 by JB



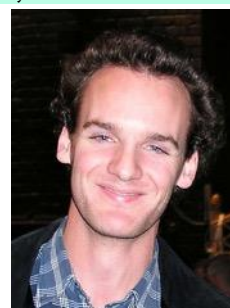
1926: the year the Parish Church became a Cathedral. 1969: the year our organ was dedicated. 2002: the year it was rebuilt and enlarged.

We heard from our 2003 organ scholar **ALEX DAVIES** in Lyme Regis where he directs the music in the parish church with a **super Skrabl organ from Slovenia** which **Richard Tanner** helped to design. Alex and his wife, Alison, run a successful B&B high in that seaside town, with fabulous views. Your editor had the pleasure of staying with them three years ago and enjoyed a scintillating organ recital by Alex which blew our socks off!

"I'm delighted to report St Michael's Parish Church in Lyme Regis held a carol service last Sunday with an excellent socially distanced SATB choir of 19, which included a few family bubbles, including my wife singing/conducting and daughter just back in time from her first term at Salisbury (she's being promoted and commences full chorister duties in January).

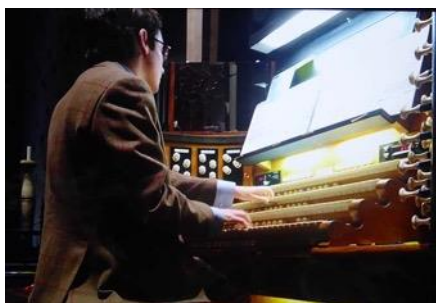
"We were allowed a short rehearsal a few days before and prepared a few easy gentle carols with a little sparkle. Typically the Church heating system packed up during the week and our superb soprano soloist reported seeing mist on the air whilst singing the first verse of "In the Bleak"! However, 48 people "booked free seats" in the congregation and all enjoyed the short service and hummed along in a few places with the ATBs singing the words, with the excellent sop line soaring a few Willcocks descants. The new team Rector Rev Chris Martin was so inspired he has invited the "ad hoc" choir to sing as often as possible."

Alison, Alex and Cecilia 3 years ago



Heartiest congratulations

to your daughter, aptly named **Cecilia**, on become becoming a chorister in the fine choir of Salisbury Cathedral.



From our former organ scholar **HARVEY STANSFIELD**, now at Coventry Cathedral:

"It's going to be a rather exciting Christmas at Coventry. My duties finish after four candlelit carol services, two evensongs then Eucharist on Sunday morning, and so I'll be back in Lancashire home for Christmas.

"I recorded **Sleigh ride** arranged by **Thomas Trotter** yesterday so you could use that if you wanted something jolly."

<https://youtu.be/MsgDAoL6LKl>



From **RICHARD TANNER**:

"You will be pleased to hear that **BEN** received **DISTINCTION** for his **Grade 5 Organ** exam, and also for his **Grade 8 Violin** exam. We're waiting to get the marks for his **Grade 8 Piano**. A busy term at Rugby for our youngest!"

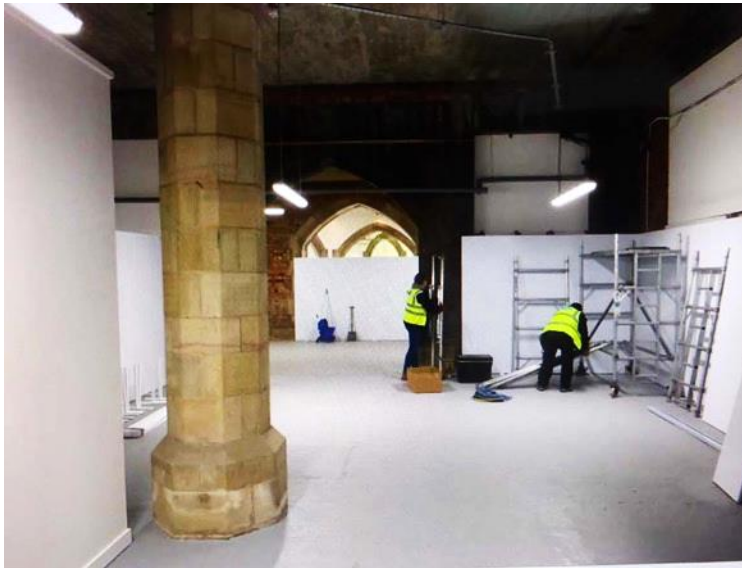
Right: the Tanner family visiting your Editor some months ago: L-R: James, Richard & Pippa, **BEN** – former chorister at St. Paul's Cathedral – as was his Dad. **Heartiest Congratulations!!**



Many of us will have received the Dean's letter at the beginning of December which included photographs of preparations being made in the Cathedral Crypt and, consequently outside, to make our cathedral a **Blackburn centre for vaccination against COVID-19 in the New Year**.

This is most welcome news

**So may our cathedral become a centre for healing both of body and mind – heart and soul.**



We are so **very** grateful to **HELEN DAVIES** who has been carrying a large weight of the preparation and fulfilment of the cathedral's music programme since before COVID hit us. She has been largely responsible for the rehearsing and singing of our YPC, and also the training of our younger choristers.

And, similarly, our gratitude goes to **SHAUN TURNBULL** who has stepped in many times to assist **JOHN ROBINSON** in his unenviable task of directing the cathedral's music when COVID-19 was swirling around us.

And this was especially true in the week before Christmas when **our Director of Music** was struck down with the disease. (After one uncomfortable day in bed, he began to recover, *Laus Deo*, nevertheless he had to be in isolation for over a week.)



81 years ago, **King George VI**, at the beginning of the last war, broadcast to the Nation: he quoted some lines that had been sent to him – for this country stood alone against the might of Nazi Germany – air raids would shortly be killing ordinary citizens in their homes, and Germany was conquering European countries with apparent ease - it could be our turn next.

The outlook was bleak for the whole world.

The King read:

I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year:

“Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.”

And he replied:

“Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God.

That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way.”



We, too, are stepping into a New Year when the outlook is bleak. People have been dying in their own homes, as have many in Europe and the whole world. But there is a way to look forward with hope, and the King told us what it was.