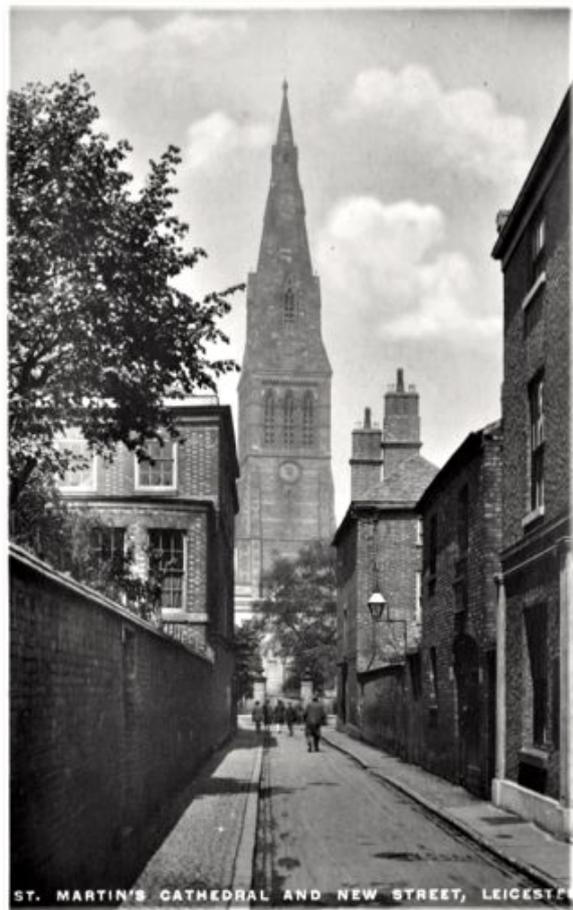


Leicester Cathedral Old Choristers' Association



Newsletter 2020



EDITOR'S NOTE

Welcome to the latest [and very late] issue of LCOCA's 2020 newsletter. Last year I thought that 2019 would be my last and yet here I am again. Like most folks in 2020, the year turned out to be horrendous in terms of lockdowns, cancelled events, churches closed, the cultural life of the country dying and friends and relatives touched by illness. Not a happy year all round... Nevertheless Richard Belton has been, as always, a stalwart of the Association in collecting all the news, photos and other information to make this another bumper edition. I should have liked to get this to you sooner but corona malaise and a complete change of routine over the year has left time very much at a premium for me. Nevertheless I hope this newsletter finds you in good health and spirits. As always, this newsletter is your opportunity to keep in touch with your cathedral, its music and those fellow choristers and songmen with whom you shared so many wonderful times. Following Nick Basford's detailed reminiscences there are two more this year from Dr Gray's time. Where are the memories of your times with Peter White, Jonathan Gregory and Chris Ouvry-Johns? I was George Gray's last head chorister and Peter White's first so the current contributions this year have triggered memories of my own which I ought to add next year. See page 31...

To keep us up-to-date with your news and anything else which you feel would be of interest to us, please feel free to email our joint secretaries at lcoca.secretary@gmail.com.

Also let us have comments on the content and what you would like to read in future editions.

When submitting articles, please ensure they are unformatted. Photos should be attached to emails and not embedded in Word documents. Thanks.

David Fisher [Chorister 1963-69 & Songman 1970s]

FRIENDLY QUIZ: *Throughout this newsletter there are sixteen numbered images of places of worship such as the two on the right – famous and obscure taken on an iPhone by me during 2018-2020 as not many visits have been possible since March 2020. How many are you able to recognise? See page 31 for details...*

David Fisher

LEICESTER CATHEDRAL OLD CHORISTERS' ASSOCIATION



PRESIDENT:

Revd. Canon Dr Johannes Arens

VICE PRESIDENTS:

Right Revd. Vivienne Faulf

Very Revd. Derek N Hole

Very Revd. David Monteith

Revd. Canon Michael T H Banks

Revd. Canon John Craig

Revd. Canon Stephen Foster

Revd. Canon Michael Wilson

CHAIRMAN:

Graham Wright

JOINT SECRETARIES:

Amanda Fitchett & Simon Mold

7 Southernhay Close, Leicester, LE2 3TW

Email: lcoca.secretary@gmail.com

TREASURER, FCOCA & FCM

REPRESENTATIVE: Richard Belton

12 Woodlands Close, Wymeswold,
Loughborough, LE12 6TF

Email: richard.t.belton@btinternet.com

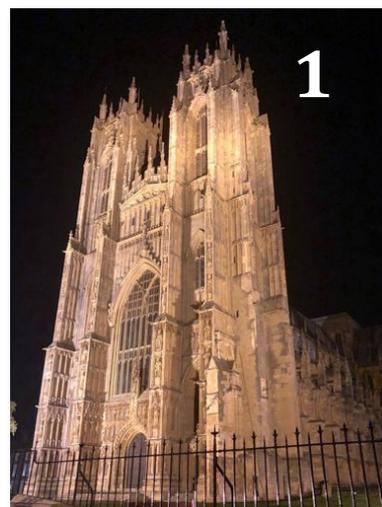
MINUTES SECRETARY: Nicholas Basford

NEWSLETTER EDITOR: David Fisher

COMMITTEE:

Dr Christopher Ouvry-Johns (Ex-Officio)

The Association was founded in 1965 and was accepted by HMRC as a charity for tax purposes in 2013. It is affiliated to the Federation of Cathedral Old Choristers' Associations which was founded in 1910. www.fcoca.org.uk





ASSOCIATION UPDATES

Due to the corona virus, the only event held during 2020 was a committee meeting on 16th March held at the usual venue of Globe Public House on Silver Street in Leicester. Little did we know that only a few days later a lockdown would be announced and further face to face meetings would not be possible for the rest of the year and into 2021. It was not possible to hold the AGM on 14th May, together with the reunion on 6th September and the committee meeting on 26th October and we were unable to set out the 2021 calendar of events in this newsletter.

The main points discussed at the meeting in March were as follows:

- The association would finance a portrait photograph of the Director of Music to add to the gallery of directors in the robing room in St Martin's House. There was also a discussion as to the frequency of when choir photographs should be taken for adding to the choir photograph gallery
- At the previous meeting, it had been agreed that boy and girl chorister leavers wishing to join the association would not pay an annual subscription until the age of 25. This matter was discussed again as it would be subject to a review of the choir consent form to include our association and an association application form being completed for data protection purposes. The appointment of a new choir administrator should facilitate this matter
- The Director of Music had brought along a collection of past chorister medals to the meeting. These included a sterling silver and enamel example from 1947, presented to the choir by Bishop Vernon on the 21st anniversary of the consecration of St Martin's as the Cathedral, another from 1961 and a collection of the medals which had been available from the RSCM. It was decided that these should be valued and quotes obtained for their restoration where necessary. The cost of new medals for presentation on an annual basis and kept by the recipients would also be ascertained.
- The accounts presented to the meeting for the period ended 14th March showed a healthy surplus of £497 mainly due to the annual

donation not being required in the usual way towards the choir tour to Truro Cathedral which had to be cancelled

- The Newsletter Editor reported that the 2019 edition was well in hand and would run to 24 pages. He had written additional comments this year on the lunch time concerts and the summer series of organ recitals, attendances at the latter having improved during the course of the series.

We would like to take this opportunity of thanking you all for your continued support towards the association which enables us to fulfil our four objectives as set out in our constitution. These are published on the cathedral website at

leicestercathedral.org/whats-on/music/choirs/old-choristers-association.

The corona virus has affected every one of us at the present time including our finances. If you find that you are in the situation where you are not a life member and cannot afford to renew your subscription at any time, keeping in touch with you is much more important to us.



DR. GEORGE GRAY MEMORIAL TRUST

<http://leicestercathedral.org/whats-on/music/choirs/choral-scholarships/>

Chairman of Trustees and Administrator:

David Briers

7 Houlditch Rd, Leicester, LE2 3FF
email: juda.briers@btinternet.com

Trustees:

**Nicholas Basford Richard Belton
Neil Crutchley Gerard Gray
Philip Leech John Thorpe**

This trust is administered by the trustees to provide scholarships to the Cathedral Choir and is governed by a trust deed dated 8th February 1983 as amended by a Resolution dated 8th

March 2010. It was registered as a charity on 1st March 1983 under registration number 513625 and any proposed changes to the trustees are ratified at the Annual General Meeting of the Association.

Dr George Gray Memorial Trust Report 2020

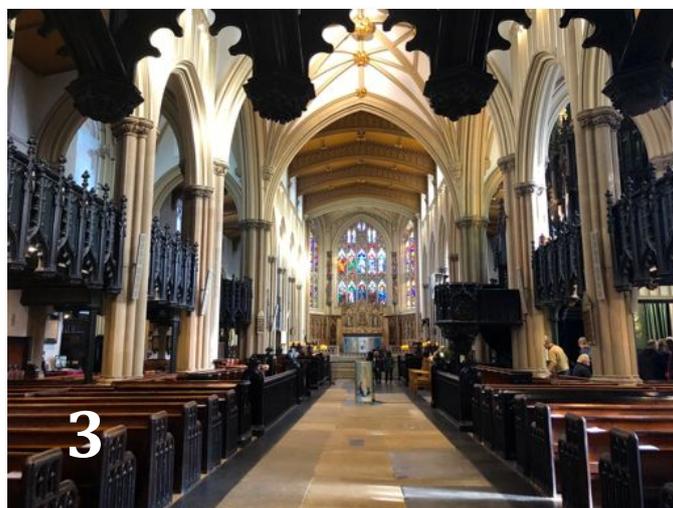
The Coronavirus pandemic prevented all church services or functioning of the Cathedral choir from mid-March to at least August. The Trustees emailed the Director of Music early in September as they had not heard whether, in the circumstances, any scholarships were to be paid, or indeed who the scholars were to be. As they had still heard nothing by 8th October the books for the year to 30th September had to be closed with no scholarships paid.

It was not possible, because of the restrictions, for the Trustees to meet for an annual meeting, but the year's accounts and associated paperwork were circulated to all Trustees, who have all indicated they are happy with them. Michael Gray stood down as a Trustee on 16th October because of his state of health; we are most grateful to him for all his support since the Trust was founded.

£363.75 was received in donations and tax recovery and £1146.98 in interest. Unfortunately the Melton Building Society has reduced its interest rate by over a half to 0.50%, and interest for the coming year will only be about £500. The Trustees have agreed to carry forward the interest from the year to 30th September 2020 to the following year, and on that basis feel they can fund eight scholarships of £200 each in 2021.

We remain most grateful to all who support the Trust, by donations with their annual subscriptions or otherwise. A good many reading this report will have received largesse from the Trust in the past, and of course there are many of us like myself who still feel we owe a great deal to George to all he taught us. Continued support in helping the Trust to continue its work of supporting present boy and girl choristers is always most welcome, especially with the still further reduced interest rates.

David Briers



CATHEDRAL MUSIC

David Monteith writes:

I wanted to say something about Cathedral Music – those directly involved will have their own voices to add. It is now hard to imagine a Church of England Cathedral without choral music. In business terms it is one of our USP's. Our musicians have been working hard to try and keep our choirs together via Zoom rehearsals and are only just beginning to sing again in the building. Some children have not returned yet for perfectly cogent COVID reasons, meaning that work now goes on in person and online, similar to our offering of worship. Work is doubled or more.

I know the large cathedrals with Choir Schools have their challenges but we have made some very deliberate decisions here which mean that the creation of our choirs is especially demanding. We offer equality of opportunity to girls and boys. We make special efforts to reach out to schools and communities that might not at first glance naturally think of a Cathedral Choir might be the place for them. This includes our DioSing! work in schools. 63% of our boys and junior girls now come from BAME heritage. More than 15% of our choirs have Special Educational Needs. The music they produce gladdens our hearts, but the fact that we are actually using music to create long lasting opportunity for our community should also gladden our hearts.

So we were overjoyed to hear that we have been awarded nearly a quarter of a million pounds from the Arts Council Covid Cultural Recovery Fund. Other bodies in the

City and County also received funding, including our friends at Curve Theatre. This is part of the Government's support for the Arts and Cultural sector because they see Choral Music as a key element contributing to our national identity. This money has to be spent by 31st March 2021 and can't be carried over.

So what will we use it for? Precise details are being worked through but it will enable us to put in support to the Music Department who could rightly claim to be under-resourced. We will be able to purchase some decent sound recording equipment to help us ensure online music is part of the future. We will strengthen the outreach work in schools and make sure it is marketed well with new schools being drawn into what we offer. It will cover a proportion of basic music costs for six months, including salaries and organ tuning (£636.00/month). We will ensure that choristers who are working with us primarily online have the necessary IT provision ensuring children are not excluded. There is also a chunk of money to help us make Christmas as special as we can manage: as a gift to our city and county recognising that significant imagination is needed with the on-going requirements of social distancing.

The real challenge will come after 31st March when we will need to try and find ways to secure more funds to keep this level of support topped up. These sums are significant but just as with excellent sport or theatre these things cost money. Whilst of course there has to be priority setting with spending, our belief that creation is a gift of God and that we are then called into creativity is not an incidental matter but a core element in faith communities. Music speaks of our values and things that matter – how many soldiers in a trench or refugees on a boat have not sung to lift their spirits and to express their desires and prayers? We will spend this public money with care but with confidence in what we are about. It is a sign of what we ultimately value – not just things which are functional or utilitarian. The scriptures suggest heaven is full of music and we are invited to mirror that here – 'as it is in heaven'. Music matters.

The Very Revd David Monteith

Dean of Leicester

October 2020

Culture Secretary, **Oliver Dowden**, said: "This funding is a vital boost for the theatres, music venues, museums and cultural organisations that form the soul of our nation. It will protect these special places, save jobs and help the culture sector's recovery. "These places and projects are cultural beacons the length and breadth of the country. This unprecedented investment in the arts is proof this government is here for culture, with further support to come in the days and weeks ahead so that the culture sector can bounce back strongly."

Chair of the Arts Council England, **Sir Nicholas Serota**, said: "Theatres, museums, galleries, dance companies and music venues bring joy to people and life to our cities, towns and villages. This life-changing funding will save thousands of cultural spaces loved by local communities and international audiences. Further funding is still to be announced and we are working hard to support our sector during these challenging times."

Director of Music at Leicester Cathedral, **Dr Chris Ouvry-Johns**, said: "Cathedral music is as much a part of our cultural heritage as the buildings in which it is heard throughout the land and the thought of Leicester Cathedral without the sound of our choirs and organ in worship and concert is like imagining a heart with no blood to pump. This funding will enable us to continue to make that tradition accessible to everyone in our community, whether they are close to us geographically or connect with us from further afield through our online offering."

The choir of Leicester Cathedral sang for three carol services on Sunday 20th December after **Professor Robert Allison**, Vice Chancellor of Loughborough University, was delighted to donate spare lateral flow tests to the singers to put this facility to good use in the wider community as the University serves our city and county. These enabled the choir to perform for the first time since March due to the pandemic and are photographed here at a rehearsal before the first carol service took place.



David Monteith, Dean of Leicester Cathedral, said: "It is a great gift to us as we could never have afforded to do that ourselves and of course we don't have the kits. It was a gift that dropped from the heavens to us, just a bit like the Christmas story itself in a sense." The services feature 35 choristers and socially distanced congregations, who could not join in with the singing this year.

Chorister **Cerys Rogers**, 17, from Hamilton, said she was "very glad" the tests were donated. "I have been singing in the choir for eight years so I have not enjoyed not being able to sing for nine or ten months," she added. Speaking after the first service, she said it was "very surreal and different... but it felt completely right as soon as we started singing". She added: "I feel very lucky to be able to do this again with the best people."

Cerys said in the run-up to the services that there had been socially distanced rehearsals where they sat two metres apart and wore masks until they reached their places. Additional safety precautions were also in place, including singing screens purchased with the help of the grant from the Arts Council Covid Cultural Recovery Fund.

MEMBERS NOTES



In Memoriam

We were sorry to learn that **Keith Beardmore** had died from cancer on 27th June 2019. Keith was an associate member of our association having been a bass songman from 1971 to

1978. His three sons, Richard, Jason and David had also been choristers at the Cathedral. There was an All Souls Requiem Mass with singing at All Saints Church, Northampton in November. This church has a rich choral tradition and Keith amongst others from all denominations was remembered by name. Several members of his extended family and friends were able to watch online. It was a welcome healing experience for all of them. Keith's wife, Gillian, is a reader at St.

Martin's Church, Welton in the Diocese of Peterborough.



It was with great sadness that we learned of the death on 22nd December of **The Very Reverend Alan Warren (1932-2020)** at the age of 88 after a time of declining health. Alan and Sylvia had enjoyed a happy retirement in Hunstanton before recently returning to Leicester and Alan had held Permission to Officiate in the Diocese of Norwich since his retirement.

One of our Association's Vice Presidents, Alan was Provost (equivalent of Dean) of Leicester Cathedral from 1978-1992, having previously been the Vicar of Holy Apostles in the city. He was Provost when Dr George Gray died in 1983 and gave his full support to the establishment of the memorial trust to Dr Gray by our association.



Alan was educated at Dulwich College and Corpus Christi College, Cambridge and ordained in 1957. During his time at Cambridge he was a choral scholar and was a violinist in the Footlights and then in the Plymouth and Leicester Symphony orchestras. He later conducted several choirs and composed choral and chamber music.



He was an MCC cricketer and in 1968 he had brief appearances for the Leicestershire 2nd XI cricket team in the Second XI Championship and played for Hunstanton and Leicestershire Golf Clubs.

He began his career with curacies at St Paul's, Margate and St. Andrew, Plymouth. After this he was Chaplain of Kelly College, Tavistock. From 1972 to 1978 he was a Canon of Coventry Cathedral and

Coventry Diocesan Missioner, serving also on the General Synod of the Church of England and on the Cathedral Statutes Commission.

In 1991 he succeeded the former England cricketer Trevor Bailey as President of the Alwyn Club and whilst in Norfolk, he founded the Brancaster Music Festival.

Amongst others he wrote "Incarnatus for Organ", 1960; "Putting it Across", 1975; and "The Miserable Warren", 1991.

There are still some families who worship at the Cathedral who remember Alan's pastoral and wise leadership at the Cathedral. He leaves a wife, Sylvia, and three daughters with their extended families.

David Fisher adds:

I first got to know Alan as Vicar of Holy Apostles, Imperial Avenue, Leicester at a time when Revd. Donald Law was his curate. Donald was the father of Jonathan, a school friend of mine, at Alderman Newton's Boys' School and we had a singing group called "Octave" which performed at Holy Apostles. Whilst in this group I had my first ever commission from Alan as a composer at the age of 16 for a Christmas Nativity set to music. *A Christmas Suite* was duly produced in the church with singers, instrumentalists and organ - all performed by children of the church who also played the characters of the nativity. For this I was paid (by postal order) the grand sum of 10 shillings [50p]. Alan was brother to Professor Raymond Warren a noted composer who taught music at Bristol University and he was very proud of him.

P.S. Has anyone a better picture of The Very Revd. Alan Warren than these two? Surely there must be... In the meantime, the poor reproductions from newspaper articles will have to suffice



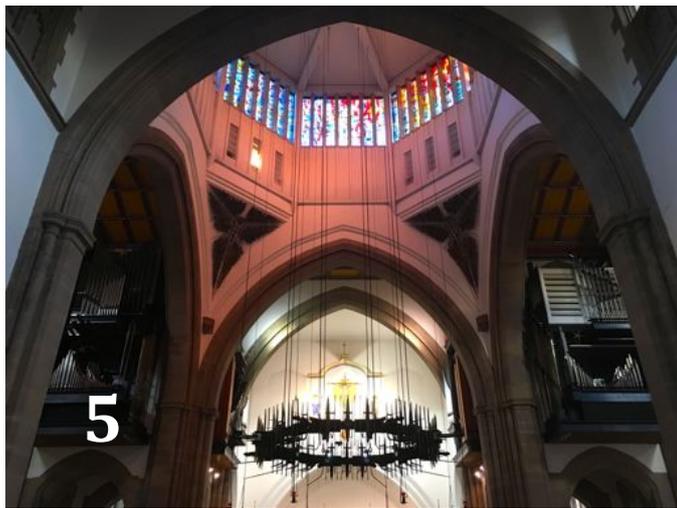
A number of people sent their comments after reading the 2019 newsletter:

From **Dean David Monteith** "Thanks for the newsletter and it is good to read the many human stories of so many that have been influenced by the ministry and music of Leicester Cathedral. We all miss being able to sing together at present and miss being able to participate in church with live music and miss that music more widely in our culture and society. We suspect many things will be changed by this time but we live on in faith and hope. Blessings and greetings to LCOCA"

Chris Fent followed with: "Thanks for forwarding the 2019 Newsletter. Reading the section with details of a chorister's life in the 60s was very nostalgic" and from **John Wood**: "An excellent newsletter. The early pictures makes one realise how the building has developed over time and lessens the pain of change now. The loss of the song school following on from the reordering of the main building will be another example. I liked Nick's description of Friday choir practice. I don't believe any of us forget those days spent in the choir. I hope they leave St. Dunstan's Chapel alone. It bears the memorial stones to

two important men in my life - George Gray and Dudley Gundry."

Ian Wilson commented on how interesting it was to read the newsletter and in particular the way in which the Cathedral has grown through the choral work. The photograph with him and fellow choristers waiting beside the train for London was fascinating and I do remember that day very well - all very grand in The Guildhall. **Chris Jager** has said how interesting it was to see **David Bishop's** reminiscences in the recent news and it certainly brought back a few memories.



News received regarding the Lockdown periods

Firstly from **Chris Fent**: "In these difficult and unprecedented times our garden has never looked so good. We have our GP daughter, who lives locally, doing our shopping for us. On our 42nd wedding anniversary in March, which was celebrated at home, we heard the news that the younger of our two boys and his wife are expecting their second child and our sixth grandchild in November. We are hoping that by then we may be able to have physical contact. At the moment Helen and I are having regular contact with all the family by Skype, Zoom and WhatsApp to name but a few Apps and becoming very proficient in all this modern technology."

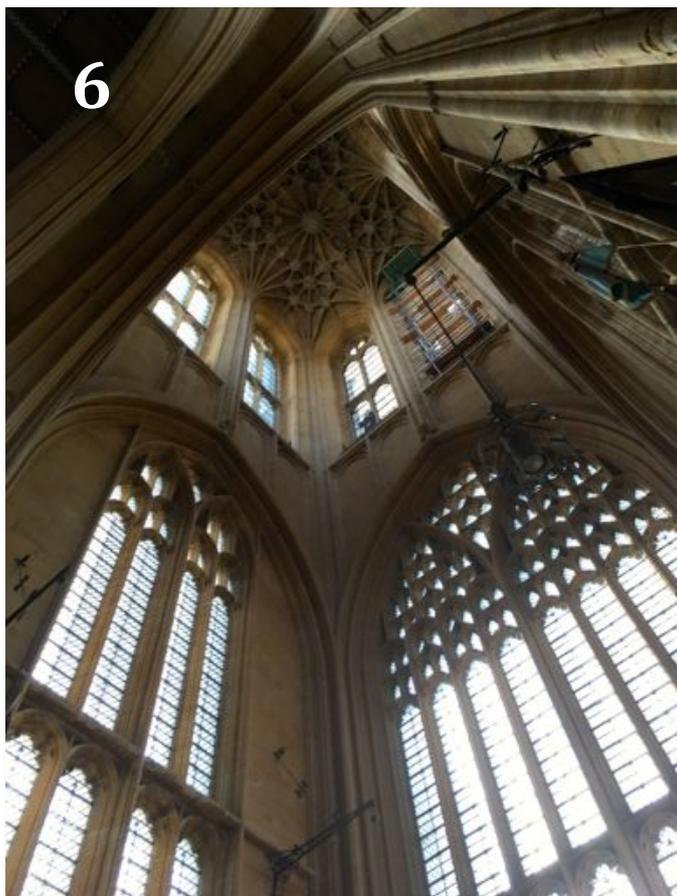
We were also sorry to learn that Julia **Dickson** (nee Gray) caught coronavirus in early March so her family were in isolation for eleven weeks. They are now fine... Julia has fully

recovered and was able to get back working hard on the frontline. **Penny Grayson Smith**, (Julia's sister) and her family live on Guernsey now so Martin and Peggy hadn't seen her since February. The island controlled the virus very well but with rigid rules, so no one was allowed in from other countries. They were only allowed to leave for essential purposes and then had to self-isolate for two weeks when they returned. However, Martin and Peggy went on Zoom to the Town Church in St Peter Port, which is where Peter, who is Town Missioner and Chaplain at the boys Independent Elizabeth College, normally either preaches or officiates and Penny sings in the Choir and sometimes preaches. She is Prison Chaplain and Vice Dean of Guernsey - the first ever woman to hold the position. When her parents hear Radio Guernsey, they realise that she is greatly valued and loved by the island people. **Michael Beacham** sang in the choir at the Town Church in Guernsey and is now at St Stephens Church on the island where Penny met him some time ago. The Leicester/George Gray connection was therefore established. Congratulations to Michael and Bernice on celebrating their Golden Wedding Anniversary on 26th April at their home on Guernsey. The Cathedral choir sang at their wedding in Leicester Cathedral which took place early in the afternoon between Matins and Evensong. Due to employment issues, Michael obtained special permission to have the wedding on a Sunday in the presence of the Provost, John Hughes and the Canon Chancellor, Dudley Gundry.



Chris Martyn and Margaret seemed to be coping with the first lockdown. Chris is a

member of the Choral Evensong Appreciation Society Facebook Group and "enjoys reading what other people post on there, by no means all of them in Cathedral choirs, which is heartening". He has also been impressed with the documenting of the resourcefulness of choirs by the association in making the best they can of the unenviable situation they still find themselves in, after lockdowns and slightly more generous social distancing rules. Chris says "We go for an hour's walk every day, mostly from our front door and into the fields and lanes nearby, and occasionally around the streets of Malvern which are eerily quiet and empty. My two keep in touch. Rhiannon (Senior Assistant Registrar at Warwick University) is working from home. **Gareth** and Philippa (both 'sales executives' for Taylor Wimpey) are currently furloughed, though there is talk of construction sites re-opening soon which *may* mean they will be required to be back at work. I spend a fair amount of time emailing friends, especially Andrew, who was in the year above me at school. A retired English teacher, he lives in Canterbury and we seem never to run out of things to talk about, either books, plays and poetry or ecclesiastical matters. He is finding the denial of access to his beloved cathedral a bit of a strain



Robert Stiff was sorry that he had not been in touch or back to the Cathedral lately. All is well with him and his work carries on as usual, but at home during the lockdown period. He enjoyed being able to sit in the garden with a laptop to work! Meanwhile **Clare Fowler** had been due to get married at the Cathedral on Saturday 8th August and decided to postpone the service until 2021.

Hilda Scarth writes "I had to cancel a trip to Kent to the holiday cottage I use in the village where Richard is buried. He played the organ there for the last twelve years of his life, saying his organist's career had come full circle having started seventy years earlier in a village church in Yorkshire. I wanted to be there particularly for 30th April which saw another important birthday - apart from Captain, now Sir Tom's 100th - Richard's 90th. At the same time, Thomas Trotter should have been opening the organ which Harrison's have finished restoring in Canterbury Cathedral, but of course that had to be cancelled but I hope to be there to join in the celebrations when they happen. Richard had several conversations with David Flood on what they should do - mainly putting back the solo organ which was done away with in 1978. I was able to help with some part of the trunking for that before it was hidden away in the north triforium. Richard was immensely grateful to **Dr George Gray** who often offered words of advice and encouragement just when he needed it and whose recommendation helped when he was looking to leave the chalk-face for something more stimulating and satisfying."

Ken Tyro wrote in October to say that "Dorothy and I are doing our best to be well and safe. We have been shielding from March to July and were enjoying a certain amount of freedom, like shopping and visiting **David**, Gill and the grandchildren, Amy and Emily. That seems to be stopped due to the second lockdown about to come into operation. However, the good news is that Emily, our youngest granddaughter, who is married to Sean Oliver, delivered a baby boy, Harrison, on 29th October weighing in at 6lb 1oz. Thus we are now great grandparents and **David** and Gill of course grandparents." In December, Dorothy and Ken had their vaccinations at the local

medical centre and they hope it will give them a little more safety.

Ed Bampton was kept busy during lockdown by being a primary school teacher while attempting to work out how to be a vicar when your church buildings are closed and you can't meet anyone. He settled down by running a local Community Hub from the church in partnership with the Parish Council, coordinating a team of local volunteers to provide practical support and phone companionship for those in need both in his parish and surrounding villages.

In February, **Claire Bampton** moved from the Leicester Diocesan Generous Giving Team to become the new Archdeacons' Officer. However, within a matter of weeks, the pandemic unfortunately hit and Claire was on furlough. In October, it was announced that Claire had been appointed Programme Manager for the Diocese of Leicester, part of the senior leadership team, for nine months thanks to national Church of England funds. She joined the Bishop's Leadership Team to help facilitate the "Shaped By God Together" process through which the diocese will be discerning our new diocesan framework. After that, if the role is made permanent, she will then work on the implementation phase of our new approach.



Claire, who had previously worked with Christian Aid, is familiar to many having worked for the diocese for more than the three years. She is also a member of the Diocesan Board of Education and has served as Lay Chair in both Akeley East and Sparkenhoe East Deaneries. Claire is well known in other roles as she enjoys volunteering in Girl-guiding and running her local Rainbow unit.

After being made redundant two or three times, **Shane Hull** considered retiring, but joined John Lewis in Norwich six years ago, working in Customer Services. John Lewis then closed temporarily early in March and Shane volunteered for redeployment driving delivery vans for Waitrose, delivering vital supplies to elderly and vulnerable during the coronavirus epidemic.



Other News

Peter Sarjeant has elected for calmer waters since his retirement from skippering oceanographic research vessels and has taken to narrowboating. 2019 saw Peter & his wife Mandy cruising the S. Oxford and Kennet & Avon Canals followed by the Thames to London (- the photo of them was taken on a tidal Thames run, just upstream of Limehouse with Canary Wharf in the distant background).

This year, once restrictions were lifted in early July, they were fortunate to be able to spend two months afloat sampling such delights as the Harecastle tunnel, the Anderton boat lift and the Peak Forest Canal to Whaley Bridge. Handy moorings enabled them to visit the World of Wedgewood, Dunham Massey and Beeston Castle and to join worship at Lichfield & Chester cathedrals during their travels, as well as to call in at several delightful village churches open for private prayer. In these socially distanced times, narrowboating gives a wonderful opportunity for fresh air, exercise and a safe way to explore England & Wales. Peter thinks this past year is the first ever that he has not spent time, however brief of late, in Leicester. He still has plans - thwarted in each of the past 2 years - to pass through on 'Pearl Dream' at some stage, mooring in Castle Gardens to visit the Cathedral. At the time of writing, he thinks 2022 is the best they can hope for ... provided creaking bones can still manage boating by that stage!!



Meanwhile, back on dry land at their home in Kingsbridge, Mandy continues as Lay Reader at Dodbrooke, crafting excellent services via Zoom as required and likewise is using that medium for Brownie meetings. Peter is winding up churchwarden duties as his six years in post is near completion. No successors in prospect for either him or his fellow retiring warden so they are busy 'dividing' tasks amongst likely candidates on their sixty-odd electoral roll. No 'youngsters' coming through, he's afraid, which seems to be a common theme running through rural Anglican parishes

A number of choristers and young songmen left the choir in the Autumn:

Joe Banerjee has taken up a choral scholarship at Worcester Cathedral, **Andrew Clarke** is now studying Maths at Warwick University, **Victoria-Jade Leonard** is now at Leeds College of Music studying Singing and **Deborah Potter** is now at De Montfort University on the English and Creative Writing Course and hopes to stay on singing in the choir for as long as possible. **Joel** and **Candice Young** are not yet university age, but want more time to concentrate on schoolwork.

Congratulations to **Victoria Roe** who won a commendation in the 2020 Sibthorp Awards from the Friends of Cathedral Music to Diocesan Representatives who have been particularly active in the past year. Vicky has worked enthusiastically year after year, encouraging the music in Leicester Cathedral,

sending out newsletters and arranging Gatherings. She chose a CD of hymns from Liverpool Anglican Cathedral as her prize and joins in lustily, thereby entertaining her neighbours, keeping her voice in trim and praising the Lord!

Charles Paterson's arrangement of "Festival Jubilate", recorded by the Leicester Cathedral

Chamber Choir, was included in the pre-recorded broadcast of the County Service for Leicestershire on Sunday 4 October.

Ron Webster wrote in October that his flying days are over after his "jolly good swansong" (see separate article entitled "Spitfire Fever"). He also adds; "Both the churches I played the organ for have closed, so, after about 33 years, I have many weekends free. It has enabled me to write a book about my home-made aeroplanes and engines which has been accepted by the publishers for printing, but at

a cost beyond my resources. I am currently looking for any local publishing firms”

Greg Stevens reports “I am as busy as ever with various projects; I am still the organist at St Hugh's, Eyres Monsell, and have just realised that I have been there ten years, which means it is ten years since I left the Cathedral choir. Time has flown and I do miss singing, so maybe joining another choir will be my next step. I am also the PCC treasurer - a difficult task when there is no money coming in on the collection plate during the lockdown. I ran a community choir in 2018 and 2019 which was based at St Hugh's and sang at local community events. This was a pleasant opportunity for local people who may not have any musical training to join with people from a similar background and just enjoy singing.

I work part time for the Out of Hours Home Visiting Service, despatching and driving clinicians to home visits for those people who are unable to attend walk-in centres and clinics. I also work at the Birstall Covid swabbing site, carrying out corona virus tests. This is far from glamorous work but I do feel like I am doing something to help the situation.

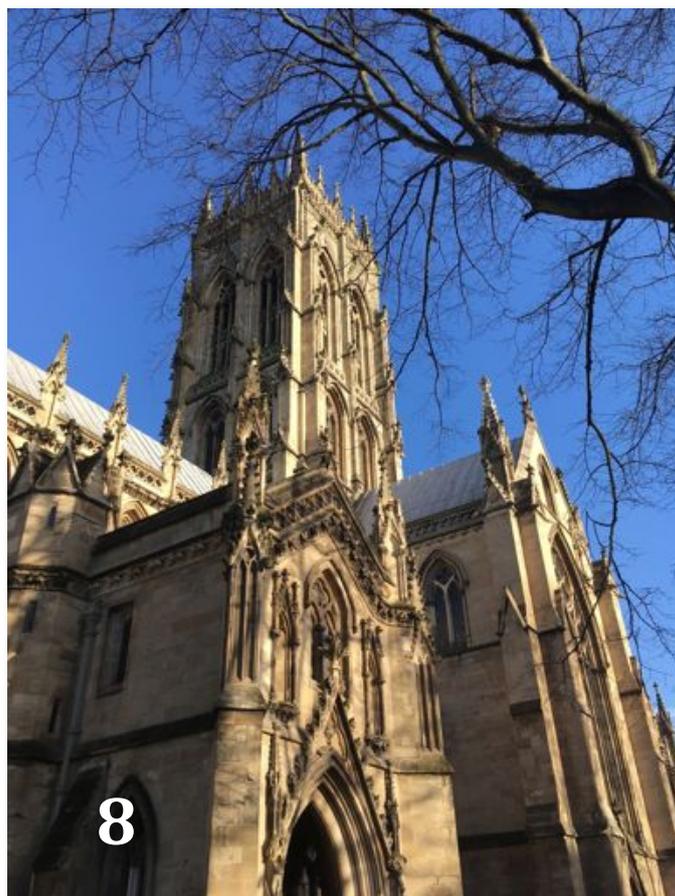
I am the Estate Planning manager at The Mortgage Genie, writing wills and property trusts for those who are planning for their families' futures. On that note, if any readers/members would like some free advice, please feel free to email me and I will be happy to help (ask Richard Belton for my email address).

When not in lockdown, I also make sure that I leave some time to visit friends and family, and recording music with friends when possible. I do keep up with what some of the members are up to via Face book - and what a successful bunch you are. Some of our achievements are truly something to be proud of.”

After 18 years, from *September 2002 to August 2020*, serving the Cathedral and community of Wakefield, **Tom Moore** decided to resign from his role as Director of Music for personal reasons. This had been a very difficult decision to take, and Tom was very sad to leave the post. His time at Wakefield had been extremely rewarding. It had been a joy for him to see so many former choristers, choral

scholars, organ scholars and his former assistant organists go on to achieve great things, and to know that he has played a part in their formative years or early years of their careers. Tom also enjoyed the daily challenge of providing high quality music with very limited resources and would forewarn any new appointment that they will need a steely resolve in order to succeed in Wakefield!

James Bowstead, the assistant DoM, has taken charge until August 2021 and a new Director will be appointed from September, 2021. Robert Pecksmith, a former Oxbridge organ scholar, who has just gained a PhD from York University in Medieval History, has been appointed as Assistant Organist for the interim period.



The world famous “Carols from King’s” service was saved at the last minute after two choral scholars within the same household tested positive for Covid-19 with the result that all of the choral scholars were replaced by The King’s Singers who include **Julian Gregory** on the tenor line. The service, which is pre-recorded each year and broadcast on Christmas Eve, marks the start of Christmas for many people. The King’s Singers stood in a line

facing west with the choristers in their normal stalls, and with only the choir, readers and the Dean present, it was a unique occasion.

David Fisher and **Charles Paterson** who, along with **Simon Mold**, are members of the Central Composers' Alliance and CCA's main loss last year was its 25th Anniversary Concert which was to be performed by Leicestershire Chorale, conducted by Tom Williams with Leicester Cathedral's David Cowen on the organ, at St Margaret's Church, Leicester, on March 28th – the poster is below. Cancelled at a fortnight's notice it has been a major upset for the choir and the featured composers. The six pieces by CCA members were ready for performance but, with the current restrictions on singing in close proximity still in force, the music to be featured will have to be rescheduled until possibly the 2022-2023 season. This will depend on several other factors but we hope that will be the case.

CENTRAL COMPOSERS' ALLIANCE

LEICESTERSHIRE CHORALE

Director Tom Williams
Organ David Cowen

25th Anniversary Concert
Central Composers' Alliance
Including works by:

Thomas Adès, Judith Bingham & Judith Weir

with: Rosemary Duxbury David Fisher
Kerry Milan Charles Paterson
Margaret Vickery Adrian Woolliscroft

Saturday 28 March 2020, 7.30pm
St Margaret's Church, Leicester

Tickets available online from
www.ticketsource.co.uk/leicestershirechorale
or from tickets@leicestershirechorale.org.uk
£15/£10 concessions

*Inspiring music
beautifully sung...*

LCOCA members may remember that **David Fisher's** anthem *Richard III: Out of the Deep* (which was due to be performed) was written for the Golden Jubilee of the Leicester Cathedral Old Choristers' Association and first performed by choirs of Leicester Cathedral, conducted by **Chris Ouvry-Johns**.

As part of CCA's 25th Anniversary a Choral Evensong at Leicester Cathedral was planned for October 2020 with music for the Girls' Choir under **Dr Chris Ouvry-Johns** direction. Unfortunately this also had to be shelved. It was to highlight music by three composers with strong Leicester Cathedral connections in that it was to have featured the world première of **Charles Paterson's** *Magnificat* and *Nunc Dimittis* and a performance of **David Fisher's** *The Tiffany Anthem* both of which were written especially for this choir. **Simon Mold's** setting of the Versicles and Responses would have completed the innovative programme. Let us hope that it can be reprogrammed. If so, LCOCA members will be informed.

Those of you who remember **Roy Birch** as one of the Head Choristers in the 1960s and as a songman in the early 70s may be interested to know that he has recently resumed singing, "in quite a serious way", as he puts it. Roy embarked on a career as a professional singer after training at The Guildhall School of Music and was becoming increasingly successful until serious illness forced him to change course, in terms of his career, and to abandon singing. But having spent rather more than a year and all of the lockdown period practising and joining in services on the 'phone and on line, he is now "keen to break out", as he puts it, when circumstances allow, and to perform, much as before, albeit more for worthwhile charitable causes than professionally. Roy therefore wonders if anyone might be willing and available to act as his accompanist – his repertoire is centred largely on English song and German lieder, and he would be more than happy to discuss the finer points with anyone who might be interested. Roy can be contacted direct at:

roy.birch867@btinternet.com

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS - Cathedral Musicians

David Cowen

**(Assistant Master of Music 1995 to 1999
& Assistant then Associate Organist 2004
to present day)**



I've now worked in the music department of Leicester Cathedral for over 20 years. A lot has changed since I arrived in Leicester in 1995. Until the day of my interview for the post of Assistant Master of the Music, I had never been to Leicester, apart from Leicester Forest East

service station, which was our regular stopping off point between my home in Northumberland and Oxford University. I was asked in my interview if I would like to live in Leicester and based on a pleasant walk between the railway station and the Cathedral, I was happy to say yes.

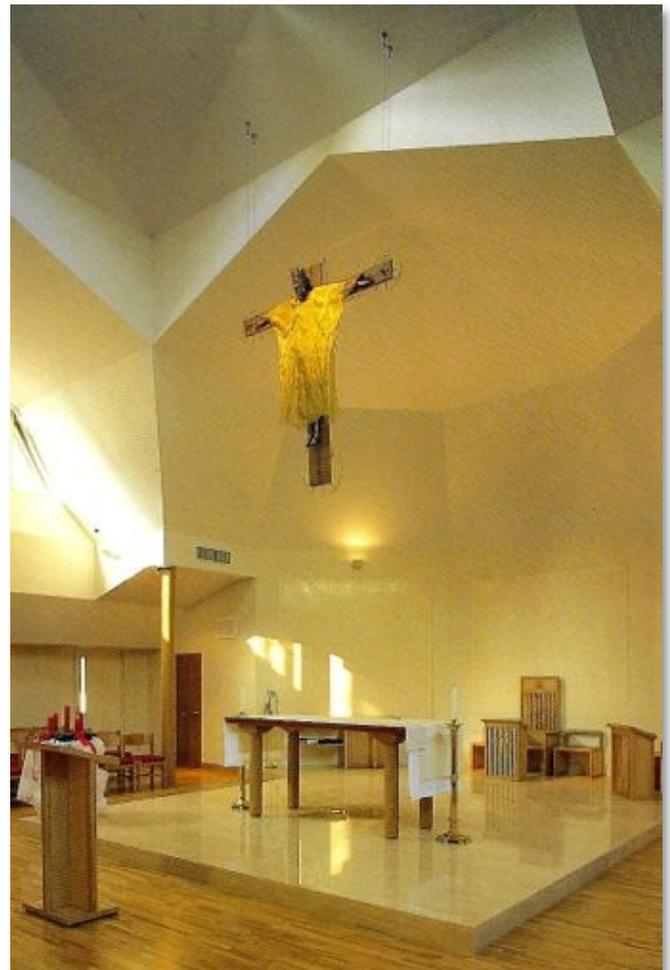
Staffing levels have changed dramatically since those days. We had only a part time secretary and a part time administrator back then and the work of the music department was covered by Jonathan Gregory and me (when I wasn't teaching at Leicester Grammar School, in what is now St Martin's House). We had no computers - the music list was sent to a printer and returned for proof-reading before being beautifully printed, and I remember having to copy out chorister pay amounts into a cash book by hand.

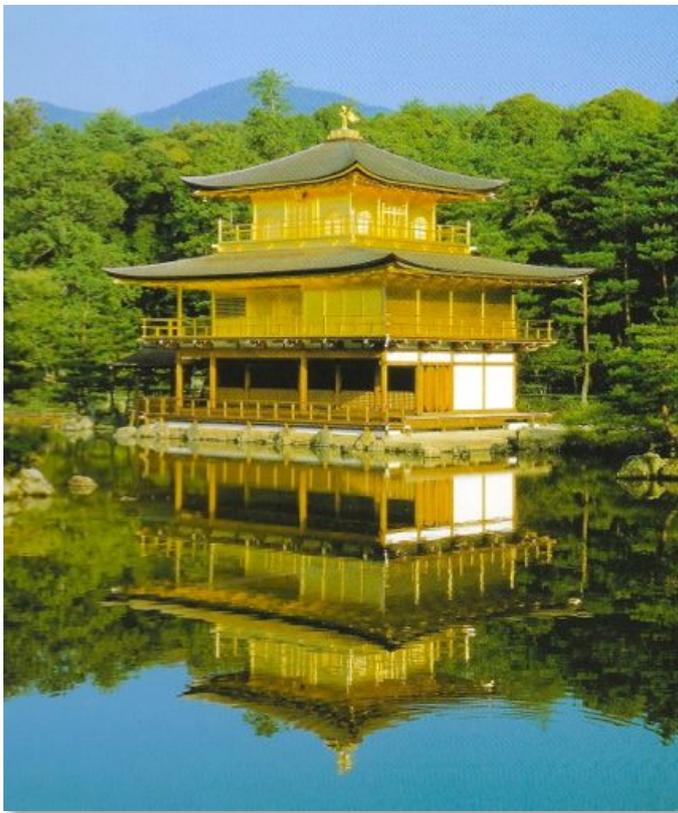
The Cathedral building was different too. The font was near the South Door, the glass doors under the gallery had not been installed and the organ hadn't yet been wonderfully restored. In fact, someone once said to me, if you ever get asked to play at Leicester Cathedral, say no! The choir sang from under the tower, which was then behind the screen (which was challenging for the organist) and all of the rehearsing was done in

the (Old) Song School, which doubled up as our office.

Even the gates on the gallery stairs weren't yet there and I thought we should restrict access to the area around the organ. I had in my mind a wooden door with a small key (which is what I was used to at other cathedrals I'd worked at). Imagine my disappointment when I discovered that I would be carrying around a 4½ inch, 30g key with sharp edges for evermore.

My role has changed over the years too. I began by doing the majority of the organ playing and helping with choir training and administration. Jonathan Gregory and I also regularly swapped places, particularly when the Girls' Choir was singing. Now I focus on the organ playing, although I enjoy working with the choristers from time to time. More recently things have changed again, as restrictions have limited our choral music. I've been at the cathedral at 7am every Saturday this term, recording as much music as I can for online services, wondering each week what time would be a reasonable hour to pull out all the stops. Usually, I settle on any time after the bleeping of the road sweeper has wrecked





my best take of the day.

Looking back on my first four years at the Cathedral, before I moved to Lyon to continue my organ studies, we achieved a lot. There was a CD recording, broadcasts and tours to Germany, France and most memorably Japan. Part of Festival UK '98, the Japan tour had a very different feel to a usual concert tour where you move from hotel to hotel, do the performances and then come home. It was a great pleasure to meet so many people on the tour and also play some amazing instruments. It was all so well worked out by Jonathan and planned and executed with unbelievable efficiency by the wonderful Yoshimi Gregory.

There were memorable musical and cultural experiences, such as the Noh Theatre visit to watch traditional dance-drama, but so many other things come to mind as well. Watching a display of lightning across the mountains, so much more dramatic than anything we experience in the UK; the awesome scale of Tokyo and the breath-taking views as we climbed into the mountains. I also have happy memories of time spent with our hosts. I learnt about how the written language worked from road signs as I was taken to the concert hall in Fuchu, a suburb to the West of Tokyo. I also remember being amazed by seeing a sat-nav for the first time – not

knowing that such things even existed, it seemed like the stuff of science fiction! And little did I know that some of those who came with us would later become colleagues or teachers of my own children, both of whom are now choristers in the Cathedral Choir themselves.

After four years, I decided I needed to develop my musicianship further so moved to France for a couple of years. I studied in Paris with Sophie-Véronique Choplin, Titulaire Adjointe at the world-famous church of St Suplice which contains one of the greatest organs ever built.



We spent most of the lessons on improvisation, which is a speciality of the French, although interestingly we focused on Bach Chorales, harmonisation and strict counterpoint in the first lessons. Only later did we explore more free styles and forms. This led to me taking part in several competitions. I twice competed in the International Organ Competition in Biarritz, a beautiful spa town near the border with Spain. In the National Marcel Dupré Competition in Chartres I had to improvise an academic fugue based on a given theme. I remember, having achieved the mind-bending task of improvising a fugue on a theme I was handed a few minutes before I played, with a regular countersubject, middle entries, and stretto to finish, one of the members of the jury said, 'You could have also modulated to the relative of the sub-dominant' And...?

At the end of my time in France, I sat the exam for the Carte Professionnelle of the Diocese of Paris. This is equivalent to the FRCO exam which I had done in my second year at Oxford but the format was quite different. There were set works including the 2^e Fantaisie by Jehan Alain and pieces by Bach and Couperin which we were given two weeks before the exam day. We then had to play a free choice piece written after 1950. There was no paperwork, as there is in the RCO exams, but there was an interview with a priest on our knowledge of the liturgy and improvisation was a much bigger part of the test.

For the service playing exam, we had to improvise a 3-minute prelude on a Gregorian Chant and then harmonise it at sight (from square note notation) to accompany a singer. Of those who played before me, one person pitched the hymn too high and after a few notes the singer adjusted it leaving the organist unable to continue. Another player tried to harmonise every note of the chant and quickly found himself left behind. In another test, we had to harmonize a modal hymn and improvise interludes whilst transposing the melody into a new key – E flat minor as it turned out.



The exam took place in St Etienne du Mont where Maurice Duruflé had been organist. In fact, he had taken an active role in the organ's extensive rebuilding.

Several years before I had helped to translate an article about this instrument, for our Organ Scholar at the Cathedral, Naoya Sano, so was happy to have the opportunity to play the organ I'd read so much about. Duruflé had taken great care over the rebuild, even having the stop tabs re-engraved at his own expense because he wasn't happy with the originals. However, with only two hours to prepare everything there wasn't a lot of time to explore it fully.

On the day of the exam, we assembled in the sacristy at the east end of the church and were handed the tasks and told what to do. Then came the long walk to the organ, down the whole length of the church, past the table at which the renowned jury sat, out of the door, into a staircase, along the front of the organ case and around to the organ console which is on the other side of the church in a gallery. Then a short wait before a disembodied voice came over the sound system: 'Vous pouvez commencer...' It was tough challenge and if my memory serves me correctly, only 4 of us out of the original 16 went home with the coveted card.

On returning to the UK, I found myself temporarily helping out at the Cathedral again - for over 15 years. In 2008, I was lucky enough to compete in and reach the final of the prestigious Haarlem International Organ Competition. A dream come true for me and a life changing experience. But that's a story for another day. At the Cathedral, things have come full circle and I'm now a permanent member of staff again and doing most of the organ playing although it's a delight to share the organ with Rosie Vinter and Chris Ouvry-Johns, both of whom play with such clarity and musicianship. There have been many memorable musical experiences with the Cathedral Choir in recent years: playing the Duruflé Requiem, which is always a pleasure; James MacMillan's stunning Cantos Sagrados last year and a memorable Radio 4 Morning Worship to mark the 50th anniversary of the Moon landings.

Each musical performance this year has been so much more meaningful as we find we can no longer take these things for granted. The value of music and the importance of our musical tradition has never been felt so strongly - for those of us who play or sing, but equally for those of us who participate as listeners.

*Congratulations to chorister **James Cowen**, David's son, on being commended in the junior (up to 14) section of the 2020 Choir Schools Association/Willcocks Composition Competition. This is a highly-reputed competition with James's composition being judged by Jonathan Willcocks.*

Geoffrey Carter
(Assistant Organist & Alto 1973-1994)



Geoffrey and Gill were pleased to report that they have both stayed well and happy despite all the drawbacks and enjoy receiving the Cathedral weekly newsletter. They managed a week away in their lovely Bothy at Meeson Hall in Shropshire. Fortunately the weather was kind so they were

determined to see the sea just once in 2020 by driving along the North Wales coast, the journey back taking in long distance views of the Welsh Mountains. They have both missed their singing but the Leicester Bach Choir had a weekly Zoom where they were able to do their exercises and explore Bach's Christmas Oratorio as well as engaging with various friends of the choir.

They have also been able to zoom in on their monthly Arts Society meetings as they sit on their comfortable settee with a glass of wine and the odd chocolate to hand. They have lived in their present home for 36 years and have been able to enjoy their lovely garden. They have missed going to concerts, but their local church managed to include a half hour musical meditation prior to compline

for five weeks during the summer and Nevill Holt Opera put on three delightful open-air concerts in the grounds. Geoffrey has had the first choice of a late friend's CD collection and so has had 125 new works to explore, mostly by modern or hitherto unknown (to him) composers.

Simon Headley
(Organist and Assistant Choirmaster on a number of occasions from 1994 to 2018)

We were sorry to learn that Simon found that it was no longer possible to be on the committee due to his working pattern and family and other commitments outside of work. Sadly he therefore had to formally relinquish his committee membership. Simon says "I have enjoyed contributing over a number of years and send my best wishes to the committee for all the work that they do to support the association".



Simon is now the historic churches support officer for the Diocese of Leicester. He was therefore delighted to report in November that applications for grants for eleven churches in the diocese from the government's £1.57 billion Culture Recovery Fund had been successful.

Simon said "Church buildings play a vital and significant role in and beyond their immediate community. However the repair costs of these historic buildings fall primarily upon congregations, so the grants are an important lifeline which will enable vital repairs to be carried out."

Eleanor Graff-Baker
(Music Consultant 2003 to 2006)



Eleanor very much enjoyed her association with Leicester Cathedral Choir when she worked principally but not exclusively with the girl

choristers. She has fond memories of summer residentials, singing in Liverpool Metropolitan and Anglican Cathedrals, Chester Cathedral and at Launde Abbey and feels fortunate to remain in touch with some former choristers whose musical foundations were forged at that time.



Eleanor read Music at The Queen's College, Oxford, where she was a Choral Bursar and a member of Schola Cantorum of Oxford. She continued her studies for a further year at Cambridge and is also an Associate of the Royal College of Music. As a violinist she has worked with many orchestras including the Royal Ballet, the London Film Orchestra and the Melachrino Strings, and with many smaller ensembles including the Leicestershire based Capriccio Ensemble, as well as playing in a wide range of musicals. She played on several occasions at the Cathedral with The Graff Orchestra with which she had lifelong connections.

Her original compositions include settings of George Herbert's poetry for tenor solo, choir and strings and Six Leicestershire Dances which use the same instrumentation as each of Bach's Brandenburg Concertos. More recently she composed music to accompany a semi-dramatic performance of Keats' The Eve of St Agnes. She is on the staff of Leicester Grammar School and conducts Loughborough University Choir.

Paul Morley **(Acting Director of Music 1994)**

Paul stood in for the four months of the summer term of 1994 before Jonathan Gregory started in the autumn term.



He also helped out when Simon Headley was Acting Director of Music in the autumn term of 2010, taking some rehearsals and conducting in services as Simon was needed to play the organ. Paul took early retirement in March 2020 after nineteen years as Business Manager at Sir Jonathan North College, after twenty two years in banking with Nat West. He spends much of his time in Sheringham when not in lockdown and has many plans for 2021, post pandemic, including expanding his work with the Jayne Morley Memorial Fund, a charity founded in memory of his late wife, which has had limited opportunities this year to continue its work with young musicians.

He continues to direct the Leicester Church Music Consort (LCMC), who like so many of us this year had commitments cancelled, which included weekend services at Wells Cathedral and an Evensong at Westminster Abbey, which would have been the groups sixth return visit to the Abbey. Paul is hopeful that plans for weekends in the future at Norwich, Winchester and Wells Cathedrals will not be similarly affected by COVID restrictions.



Paul continues to support his two sons in their lives and musical endeavours. Both former head choristers at St James the Greater, they still sing with LCMC, with his eldest son Thomas, a twice finalist in the BBC Young Chorister of the Year Final, now studying a part-time masters degree in music therapy in London as well as teaching in schools.

TWO FOND MEMORIES OF TIMES SPENT AS LEICESTER CATHEDRAL CHORISTERS

Stephen Wain (1959 to 1966)



I can still actually remember my mother taking me to Dr Gray's house for the audition at the age of 7 and I also remember how pleased my mum was when she was told by Dr Gray that normally he didn't take boys until they

were at least 8 years old but that he would make an exception. I spent approx 7 years in the choir, my voice breaking when I was around 14. I particularly remember how disappointed I was because we had been rehearsing for a radio broadcast and I was excluded at the last minute because my voice kept dropping into the lower register without warning.

I wonder if anybody else remember how we used to arrive early for practices and services just so we could play a form of cricket outside in St Martin's East. We'd use the cast iron drainpipe outside of the rehearsal room door as the wicket and our bat was our fist and of course bowling was underarm. On a Sunday between the afternoon and evening services, we used to climb over the fence at Alderman Newton's school to play football.

It was a big commitment being a chorister at such a tender age, I remember:

Monday	practice and service.
Thursday	rehearsal.
Friday	rehearsal.
Saturday	rehearsal and service
Sundays	Services at 10, 4 & 6

...and we had four services on the first Sunday of every month – Matins, Choral Eucharist and two Evensongs – with the boys singing at all four. Of course we received pay in recompense plus extra for weddings and funerals, radio and TV broadcasts.

I remember us being on BBC's Songs of Praise. I sat down with my Mother and Father to watch the event in our lounge and a couple of minutes before it was due to start, the TV blew up and we had to dash across the road to watch it at my Grandma's.

One of the highlights of the year for me was the annual day trip to Skegness, I suspect many of us ended up taking a sub from our pay (*amazing how far a 15 shillings went in those days and for any younger person reading this it is 75p*).

Other perks were the Christmas lights being switched on in the Town Hall Square where we would sing carols on a stage that was erected on the town hall steps followed by tea with the Lord Mayor, and being let off school early for the various functions that required our services including the opening of the Assizes. HAPPY DAYS.

I left school at 15 and started an apprenticeship as a hairdresser. Having learnt the trade, I was then able to go into business for myself. Older readers may well remember the "*Stephen Wain Salons*" which were located in Churchgate, Silver Street (above what was Freeman Hardy and Willis), Haymarket Centre, Fleckney, Oakham and Melton Mowbray.

One of my hobbies included Scuba Diving and it was at our clubs annual dinner dance that I met my wife Shirley. We were engaged and married inside of a year and we are still together 47 years later. Shirley was a psychiatric nurse and trained at Carlton Hayes. After the wedding we lived in Stoneygate, then Syston and lastly Tilton on the Hill. In 1986, together with our daughter Michelle and our son Scott, we sold the businesses and moved to Ilfracombe in North Devon where I bought a hotel. In 1996 we again sold up and I

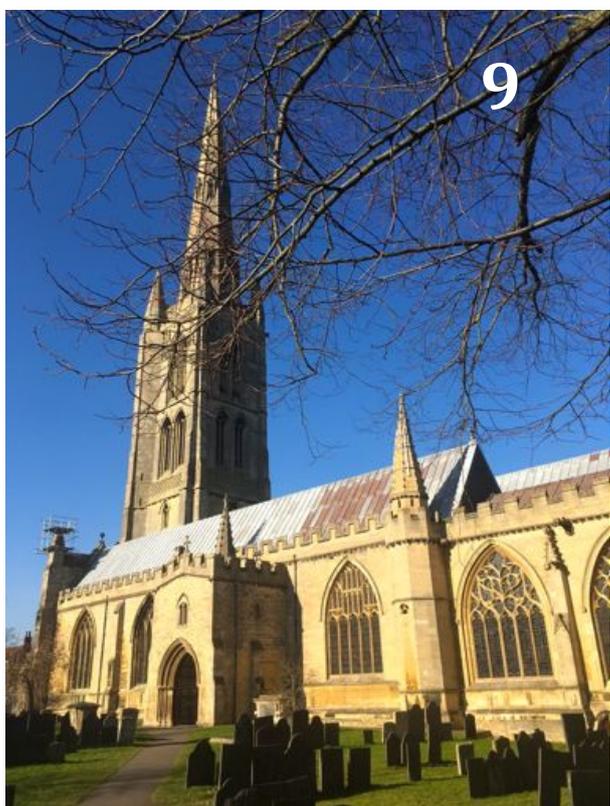
found a lovely 4 bedroomed bungalow in Woolacombe. It has a fantastic view of the beach and across to the Isle of Lundy.



We then decided that we would start a small guesthouse which turned out to be really successful after turning it into an 8 bedroomed bungalow.

Unfortunately, due to the Covid virus and the fact that I am in the high-risk group, we decided it was time to retire and we duly cancelled all of our seasons bookings. I hope that everyone has remained safe and well in these turbulent times we find ourselves in.

December 2020



Chris Jager (1954 to 1959)

When I was 10 my father was appointed as the Diocese of Leicester Industrial Chaplain, and a Senior Chaplain at Leicester Cathedral. At the same time I passed an audition for the Cathedral Choir.



I have always considered how fortunate I was to be in Leicester. The Cathedral was one of the few where there was no choir school, but all the choirboys went to local schools and lived at home. There have been television documentaries about these institutions where the boys seemed to lead privileged lives devoted to music, and occasionally I wonder if I might have enjoyed that, but always the idea of boarding school of any kind appalled me. My father had been to public school and clearly was not happy there, and did not want us to go through the same experience. But here in Leicester I was able to sing in a choir that was as good as most of them, and still lead a normal life.

Every Sunday there was Matins in the morning, Choral Evensong at 4pm, and Nave Evensong at 6.30. In addition there was Choral Eucharist on the first Sunday of the month. The boys were expected to do all 4 services on some Sundays, though the Nave Evensong was sometimes men only. On Mondays there was Evensong with boys only, with a very small, or sometimes non-existent, congregation. There was also a men only Evensong on Wednesday and full choir on Saturday. The main rehearsal for the whole choir was on Friday, with one for boys only on Thursday.

There were of course extra requirements, such as the Assize Services which were midweek and meant we had to get time off school. They were of course very popular. Sadly that cannot be said for the Ordination Services which came round three times a year. They would last about two hours, and our involvement was not great.

The only redeeming feature was that instead of being in the choir stalls we were up in the gallery at the west end of the Cathedral so we were not in public view as much as normal.

I started as a probationer, but I was quite soon moved along the line as I had some experience from having sung in St Leonard's choir. Pretty well all the music was new to me, but I found it easy to pick up the standard repertoire from the older boys to whom it was familiar.

The organist and choirmaster was **George Gray** who, even decades after his death, is still a revered figure. He was a pupil of Edward Bairstow and became his deputy at York Minster before moving to Leicester Cathedral. He was a really inspirational person, who combined strong musicianship and great teaching skills with a genuine interest in us as boys. He might get a bit ratty if we didn't do what he asked, but that never lasted, and all he wanted to do was get the best out of us.

There was a typical incident not long after I joined. A boy who had left the choir recently turned up one Sunday morning to see him. He greeted the boy warmly, asked him all about what he was doing, showing a genuine interest, then thanked him for coming and said goodbye. The boy turned up again a week or two later and exactly the same thing happened. It was only after his third visit that the boy actually got a chance to say why he had come to see him, which was to ask if he could have organ lessons.

There was a significant difference at the Cathedral then from what is standard practice these days, in that George would conduct unaccompanied music, but if there was organ accompaniment there was no conductor. This sounds risky, but we were trained to look across at the other side. If an entry involved all parts starting together, we would look at the lead tenor on the opposite side, and those two would coordinate their entries. If it was trebles on their own, the boys would look across at the head boy on the other side. It became routine for us automatically to look across for all entries. When I told a cathedral organist recently about this, he was very dubious, but it worked, even for pieces like the Stanford Te Deum in C where the whole choir

comes in forte a beat after the opening chord on the organ.

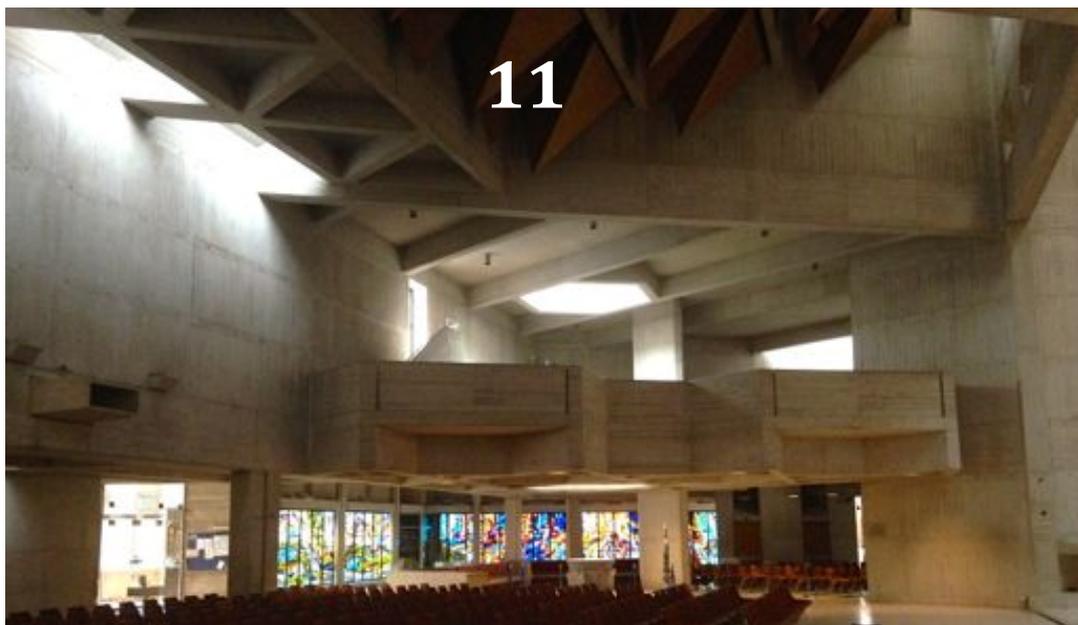


Because my father no longer had a parish and the vicarage that went with it, the diocese provided a house in Stoneygate, on the other side of Leicester. This meant I had to change schools, from Alderman Hallam Junior School to St John the Baptist Church School. A number of boys from the school sang in St John the Baptist Church Choir, including one who had a particularly striking voice. So a part was written for him in the school nativity play.

Unfortunately for him, about two weeks before the play was due to be performed, he went down with bronchitis, so they needed a replacement. A couple of the other boys from the church choir volunteered the information to the teacher that I was in the Cathedral Choir so I ought to do it. I'm sure I'd never suggested that I was any better than them, so I wasn't expecting it, but I agreed to do it. All I had to do was walk down the aisle (it was in the Church), singing the last verse of "In the Bleak Midwinter" and kneel down in front of the crib. I really enjoyed doing it and was surprised at the respect I got.

My father's post of Industrial Chaplain didn't last much more than 18 months. Part of his job involved visiting factories, holding short acts of worship and meeting workers. People would come to him not to discuss aspects of religion but to complain about working conditions. He naturally tried to help them, but it was made clear to him that that was not what he was there for. So he resigned and was appointed Vicar of Earl Shilton and Rector of Elme Thorpe. However he could not take up the position straight away so he spent the summer as Padre at Butlins Holiday Camp at Filey. Part of the deal was that the whole family stayed there for four weeks in August.

This took place in the theatre in front of a large audience. The only other acts I can remember were four sisters who sang (and danced to) "Smile though your heart is breaking", and a boy who sang "I remember my September love". He had a strong voice and was fine once he had found the right note. I think he sang first and at the end was greeted with applause, cheers and whistles. There was then another pop song which got the same appreciation. Then it was my turn. I can't remember being nervous, but a bit concerned that my contribution was different to all the others. But I need not have worried as my singing was also greeted with applause, cheers and whistles. I didn't win, but I enjoyed being on stage.



There were all sorts of entertainments and activities, including a talent competition. My mother suggested I enter, which I was happy to do. I had no music but there were a few things I could sing from memory. I turned up for the auditions which were held in a hall with a stage and a piano. There was a master of ceremonies who introduced us in a supportive manner, and a woman at the piano who was clearly a real pro. She could play all the current pop songs from memory and keep up with the variable nature and musicality of the singers. "Do you know *Come Unto Him* from the Messiah?" I asked. "Certainly" was her reply, and she accompanied me as ably as she had all the other performers. There were about 20 acts, and seven of us were selected for the final.

Though we were now living 10 miles outside Leicester, I was able to continue in the Cathedral Choir. After a year at St John the Baptist Junior School I had moved on to Wyggeston Boys Grammar School. I joined the school choir, and in my second year we sang the Fauré Requiem, with Armstrong of 3A playing the organ. At that age you take things like that for granted, but my mother was astonished to see a 13-year-old play with such accomplishment. It was no surprise that he went on to make a name for himself. 30 years or so later I was singing the Britten *War Requiem* under his baton. He had extensive spells as director first of Welsh National Opera, then of Scottish National Opera. In 2004 he became Sir Richard Armstrong.

Back at the Cathedral, because of the distance I had to travel I was now excused the Thursday rehearsal and the 6.30 Sunday Evensong, but this still involved long bus rides on Saturday and twice on Sunday. However I continued because I enjoyed it and worked my way up the choir until I became Head Boy on Decani.

My favourite anthems were "*Blessed Jesu, Fount of Mercy*" by Dvorak (Eia Mater from the Stabat Mater), "*O Sing unto the Lord*" by Purcell, "*How Lovely are Thy Dwellings*" by Brahms (from the German Requiem), "*Blessed be the God and Father*" by Wesley, and "*Glory and Honour and Laud*" by Charles Wood. This last one I had never heard since I left, until I started writing this. I would love to be able to sing it as a bass sometime. I don't think I was particularly keen on modern music until later, and it certainly took me a little while to



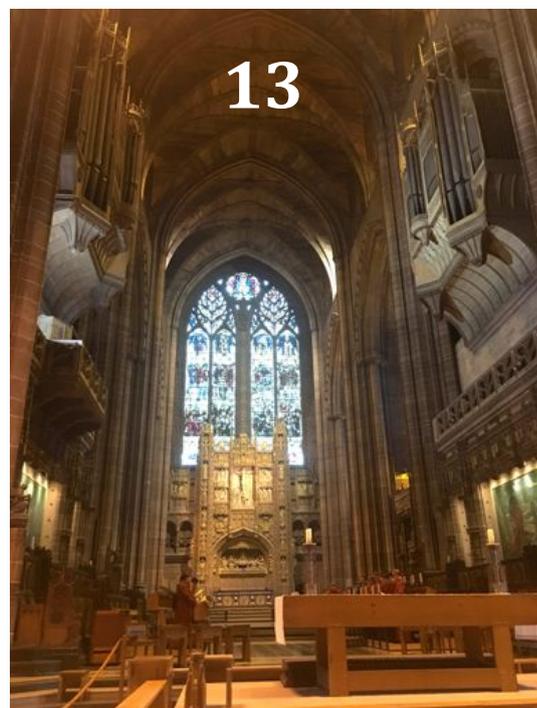
appreciate Herbert Howells.

At that time Leicester Bach Choir, which was also directed by George Gray, used to perform Bach's *St Matthew Passion* in the Cathedral every year during the weekend before Easter. Part One on the Saturday evening, and Part Two on Palm Sunday afternoon. The choirboys would sing the ripieno choir part in the opening chorus, and also join the sopranos in the final chorale of the first part. The first year I sang it, I'm not sure I enjoyed sitting for over an hour listening to music that was completely new to me, but it didn't take long for me to grow very fond of it. A few years later I was attending the second

part just to be able to hear the whole work. If I had to choose a favourite work, this would be it. And I worked out I have sung it (not always the complete work) with seven different choirs.

A few years ago the Cathedral Choir went on a trip to Japan. I can't remember us going any further afield than Derby. There were several regular engagements in the city, such as Christmas Carols at the Town Hall followed by tea and cakes in one of the ceremonial rooms. It was the refreshments afterwards that made these trips worthwhile. I remember one occasion when the hosts underestimated the appetites of choirboys, and by the time the adults arrived there were just a few crumbs.

It was probably quite early in my time at the Cathedral, that a special service took place in the De Montfort Hall. I think it was the climax of a series of events as part of a mission of some kind, but it was clearly very important as the preacher was Michael Ramsey, then Archbishop of York. I can't remember why we were there, or what we sang, but we were sitting on the wooden floor of the stage, most uncomfortable and in full view of the congregation. When the Archbishop got up to preach he gave what seemed like an excessively long introduction, then he explained "I want to make six points". Then after another interminable length of time he said "and the second point is this". The adults said afterwards what a fine sermon it was, but for a young choirboy it was rather mind-numbing.



This picture dates from my first Christmas in the choir in 1954. We are on the Town Hall steps and I am the second from the right, third row back. Far left is Very Rev Mervyn Armstrong, the Provost, with George Gray behind his left shoulder. The three clergy at the back are (left to right) Rev George Jager (my father), Canon James Atkinson and Rev Francis Pratt.

Guest, Alan Blandon, Granville and Roger Kestrel, Howard Mason, Richard Belton, David Bishop and Rupert Morris, who acquired the nickname Squeaker.

My voice didn't break till I was 15, at which point I started singing alto. This meant that I could stay in the choir till I went to university, and while my alto voice never really developed, mainly because I was probably too



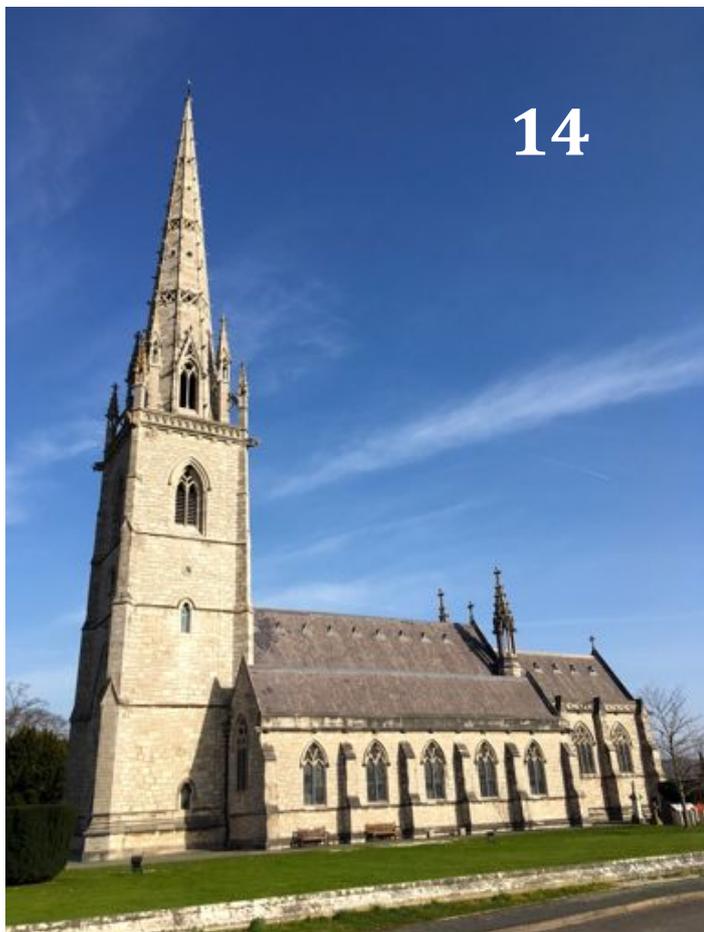
Two friends I particularly remember were **David Bish** and **Malcolm Gregory**. David's two older brothers had passed through the choir. He was head boy on Cantoris when I was head boy on Decani, and when his voice broke, Malcolm replaced him. He was the middle of three brothers. His older brother, Howard, had also passed through the choir and had won an organ scholarship to Cambridge. His younger brother had by then also joined the choir, and returned to the Cathedral in 1994 as Organist. Others I remember are **Roger Bowerman**, who preceded me as head boy of Decani, **Ronnie**

self-conscious to practice, I enjoyed exploring the music from a different angle.

The songmen (as they were called) were all amateurs, but the standard was high. They were very supportive and made me feel an important part of the choir, even though to start with I couldn't really contribute much. Malcolm Gregory's voice broke shortly after mine and he also joined the altos.

I was still singing the Saturday Evensong and Sunday Matins, and also the 6.30 Evensong. The boys would, I think, do alternate Sundays for that service, and the men were generally ones for whom this was

their only service; you might call them the second team, but they were still all good singers. The canticles would be sung to chants, and the anthems were generally quite straightforward, though not always. George Gray would sometimes direct the choir, but he would leave after the anthem, his reasonable excuse being that he had already done at least two services. On one occasion he tried to leave as discretely as possible while the choir and congregation were singing: "The ancient law departs and all its terrors cease".



If George wasn't there, the deputy organist, **Sidney Rudge** took us. He was a well-liked man, a bit unimaginative and predictable, but a brilliant organist. On one occasion the anthem to be sung was Purcell's Bell Anthem, but it was men only, so some altos would have to sing the treble part. To make it easier he agreed to transpose it down a semitone. For those who do not know the piece, it is called the Bell Anthem because the introduction has a series of C major downward scales in the left hand to give the impression of a peel of bells. So to play it instead in B major is quite a feat and he pulled it off without batting an eyelid. Not long after I left he died

suddenly of a brain tumour while on holiday in Scotland, and the choir were devastated.

In time Malcolm and I started going to the pub favoured by the songmen – the Rutland and Derby Arms. To get there you went along New Street, the road opposite the main door to the Cathedral, and turned right at the end, if I remember correctly. On one occasion we were driving down New Street when the driver said "Do you realise that Richard III is buried over there?", pointing to a piece of waste land that was being used as a car park. He was wrong. It was on the opposite side of the road!

Like many choirs, beer was a significant part of the culture. Various hymns and anthems had alternative words to go with the subject. However this lot went as far as rewriting the entire text of an anthem by William Boyce. I never heard the whole of the amended version, but the opening words "The Lord is King, be the people never so impatient" became "Our beer is best, be the wine list ever so inviting" Later on came "Some put their trust in whisky, some put their trust in vodka, but we will remember the name of the ale we drink" For those who don't know the work, the words replaced were "chariot", "horses" and "the Name of the Lord our God". The final bars should have been "Alleluia, Alleluia", but adapted a well-known advertising slogan of the time "Double Diamond worketh wonders"

I was also singing alto in the school choir; in fact that started well before my voice broke. The music master would recruit trebles who could hold a line, as there were no countertenors among the staff, though there were enough tenors and basses from their number to support the boys whose voices had broken. So the programme was fairly ambitious. I remember doing the Easter Hymn from *Cavalliera Rusticana*, the first part of Haydn's *Seasons*, and two Stanford cantatas, *The Revenge* and *Phaudrig Crohore*.

But the most ambitious was the *St Matthew Passion*; however it was a special arrangement. The more complicated choruses and a number of recitatives and arias were omitted, and the whole thing was transposed down a tone. The most disappointing aspect was that the grand opening chorus was replaced with a harmonisation of the ripieno

soprano tune. Nevertheless there was enough left to make it a really enjoyable experience. This didn't prevent the sixth former who was delegated to write a review for the school magazine from stating "This was not an arrangement that would make Bach turn in his grave, as he would be unlikely to recognise it as his own work".

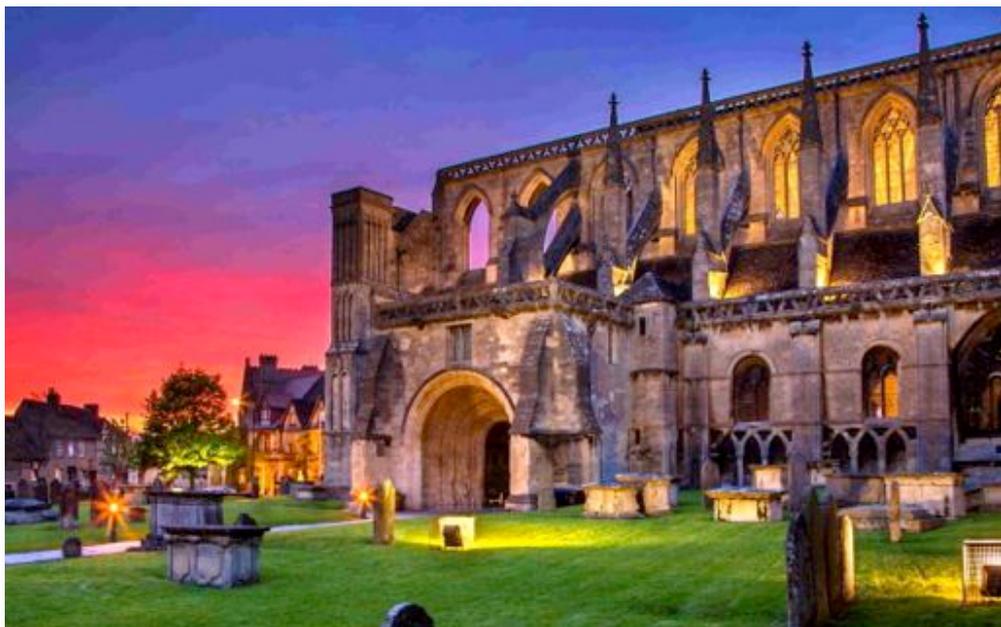
My mother would attend every school concert that she was able to, and appreciated what she heard, though she was prepared to pass criticisms if necessary. On the occasion of the St Matthew concert she met a friend in the audience who was also a mother of a choir member. During the interval this lady said that she actually preferred Stainer's *Crucifixion* as it had such nice tunes. My mother was speechless! I continued singing alto at the Cathedral until shortly after my 19th birthday when I started at Nottingham University, and never sang alto again, because I was much happier singing bass.

One of the altos at the time was **Tom Belton**, whose son Richard was a choirboy. He took it upon himself to start an Old Choristers Association, so I did not lose touch with the Cathedral. This was a successful move as the association has grown over the years, and Richard has been actively involved with the Federation of Old Choristers Associations, which is represented at many Cathedrals and large churches. They hold festivals every year in different locations, and in 2004 it was Leicester, so I decided to attend. It was an enjoyable event, though there were few people there that I knew. One person was **Jonathan Gregory**, and it was strange that someone I remembered as a probationer was now the highly respected organist. The anthem at Evensong was *The Lord is King* by Boyce, but it seemed the alternative words had passed from the collective memory.

In 2015 Leicester Cathedral made the news with the re-interment of Richard III. I watched the service on television and felt

immensely proud that I had once been part of the choir that sang so brilliantly that day.

As choral singing has been so much part of my life, I have decided to write a book about it. At the moment I have run into a bit of a block writing about more recent things, but I had no problem recalling my life at the Cathedral. I'm surviving the lockdown OK, and if all goes well I will be singing Christmas music with Malmesbury Abbey Choir and Bath Bach Choir, albeit rather different from previous years. The Abbey has done well to adapt and it is likely that when things return to something like normal they will still carry on producing online services.



I pass my best wishes onto anyone who remembers me.

December 2020

CANON PRECENTORS

"This month we are saying our official farewell to **Canon Dr Johannes Arens** who has served Leicester Cathedral as Canon Precentor since 2011. For the past year he has been basically seconded to explore how to develop the chaplaincy role at De Montfort University. He has now been appointed as Priest for St Andrew's Jarrom Street adjacent to the Leicester Royal Infirmary and to develop the Chaplaincy.



I had the privilege of working with Johannes as a fellow Residentiary Canon based at 21 St Martins with both of us travelling in and out from our homes in the suburbs. At that point **Richard** and **Lillian** were young children at

Primary School and **Esther** (his present wife as she has often been described) found work at the University of Leicester Library. Dolly the collie and Cloudy the rabbit added more dimensions to the Precentor's household. The choir wasn't at its best in 2011 and although there were hopes for the re-ordering of the building, there wasn't much prospect of it happening.

I can still remember the first Evensong when Johannes was Cantor bringing a clarity, beauty and power of voice to the service. That sense of presence would come to be worked out in so many ways in the coming years. We joke about it sometimes but the fact that Johannes is German by birth has mattered. We have had two Royal Visits (from the German relatives as he would say!) and a Royal Reinterment; we've marked the centenary of the First World War and worked to build up good relations with the Royal Tigers' Regiment, the Services and Civic community. He has helped us think about issues afresh such as the relationship between faith and the national narrative since at one level he came to that as an outsider. This has been so helpful to us in Leicester since so many of our community have been considered as outsiders too.

Johannes was baptised and grew up in the Roman Catholic Church but then found the Old Catholics in Germany whose clergy are recognised by Rome and as a church they are in full communion with the Church of England. So Johannes also brought an ecumenical instinct to his role which was especially helpful in building connection with our friends at Holy

Cross Priory on New Walk. His commitment to a catholic and sacramental understanding of the church also brought a clarity to the way he created services or approached an issue – sometimes this may have created as many questions as it answered but it led to an on-going and lively debate which seemed incredibly healthy. I particularly remember the evening when a small number of us gathered for the Eucharist on the weekend before the Richard III events began to consecrate our new alabaster altar with great quantities of oil being used to anoint this new focus where we would come to treasure the presence of Christ coming to us in bread and wine. It was done properly and it needed someone like Johannes to make sure of that. It is hard to be in a room and to not notice Johannes. There is usually banter, humour and usually a bit of church gossip which involves many eyes sailing heavenwards. We all learnt never to mention the C word (Christmas) until 24 December at about 4pm otherwise life would be miserable for everyone. Much mirth was made of such matters too.



Equally if we needed someone to drop everything to go to the hospital to visit someone or to deal with a vulnerable, distressed person he would be our first call. He offers an appropriately bounded yet expansive sense of compassion and empathy. This has played out often as the core of his sense of his priestly role which is then entrusted to God in prayer and at the altar. It makes so much sense that he finds himself now serving in Chaplaincy. However, my

abiding memory will never be eradicated from the day of Richard III's reburial. I was caught up in the official Reception following the live broadcast and then spent much of the afternoon doing media interviews. I knew that our core cathedral team had gone to Taps (our local bar) for a well-deserved drink. I arrived late in the afternoon to encounter a group of people feeling very pleased with what they had done and enjoying a party. Johannes was in the midst of this still wearing his cassock and his Don Quixote priest's hat complete with elaborate red tassels as befits a Canon(!) with Lady Gretton, the then Lord Lieutenant by his side both with pints in their hands and thoroughly enjoying the moment. I was waiting for them to start singing any moment and thought best I slip away home – quickly! I can honestly say that with Johannes there has been a sense of life in all its fullness.

Our thanks, love and prayers now send him and the family on their way. We look forward to continued connection in the coming years as neighbours and good friends.



Following on from the farewell to Johannes, the Bishop of Leicester appointed **Revd Canon Emma Davies** as the new Canon Precentor and Canon Residentiary at Leicester Cathedral. She had been Acting Precentor for more than a year

following secondment from her role as Team Vicar in the Avon-Swift benefice in Leicestershire.

Dean of Leicester, the Very Revd David Monteith, said: "I couldn't be more delighted that the Bishop has appointed Emma having interviewed a very strong field of four candidates. On behalf of the Chapter, I am delighted to welcome her and her family. We look forward to her formal installation on Sunday 31st January 2021, which will mark the

start of this new phase of ministry. Emma will not only carry out the normal duties with professionalism and care but she also has great passion for ensuring that our music and liturgy becomes a vital dimension of growing in faith and discipleship."

Emma said: "I am really delighted to accept the role of Canon Precentor at Leicester Cathedral and very excited to be taking the work I have begun in shaping the liturgy and music here into a new dimension with the addition of responsibility for spirituality and discipleship.

"As well as recent experience at the Cathedral, I bring something of the perspective of the wider county with me into this role from my ministry in rural parishes over many years. My family and I now are looking forward to this new chapter, making our home in the city centre. It will be very good to be working afresh with familiar and new faces in the Cathedral and diocese as we seek to grow in faith and to worship God together."

The Very Revd David Monteith

Dean of Leicester

October 2020

In December, the Bishop was pleased to announce that Johannes had been appointed as an Honorary Canon of Leicester Cathedral.

FEDERATION OF CATHEDRAL OLD CHORISTERS' ASSOCIATIONS



The Executive committee met in Leamington Spa in October 2019 and intended to meet again in person in March 2020, but this had to be cancelled due to Covid-19. The committee however managed to meet via Zoom video conferencing software in May and July 2020. These meetings proved very successful, so the committee are likely to use Zoom again. A Newsletter was published in August this year.

The **2020 AGM** was due to be held in Rochester in May but had to be cancelled due

to Covid-19. It was rescheduled and took place as a video conference in September.

The Chairman, Alastair Pollard (Durham), had come to the end of his five year tenure in office and the position was therefore taken over by the Vice Chairman, Nick Hodges (Warwick). Arnold Wills (Peterborough) was elected as Vice Chairman alongside his existing role as Development Officer. Nicola Pollard (Durham) stood down as Secretary, but may be asked to assist her successor, being her husband Alastair!

The outgoing Chairman was pleased to report that "The federation had been working closer with the Cathedral Music Trust (CMT), Friends of Cathedral Music (FCM) and the Diamond Fund for Choristers (DFfC). All of these organisations have much in common including a love of cathedral-style music and a desire to keep the traditions going, and a recognition that we had to change to better meet the challenges of the modern world. The trustees of FCM launched a new charity CMT to better suit the needs of the twenty-first century, and to work as an umbrella organisation for the work of FCM and DFfC".

He stated that "At the federation, we move with the times, whether we like it or not. All our communication is now electronic, be that email, website, video-conferencing, and we now have a presence on social media (Facebook, Twitter). I am pleased that the federation has continued to publish our magazine *Once a Chorister*, now on line. I have had the privilege of being the editor for the past 3 years, following the sterling work done by Michael Barry and then Richard Watts. I hope to publish *Once a Chorister* again in November 2020."

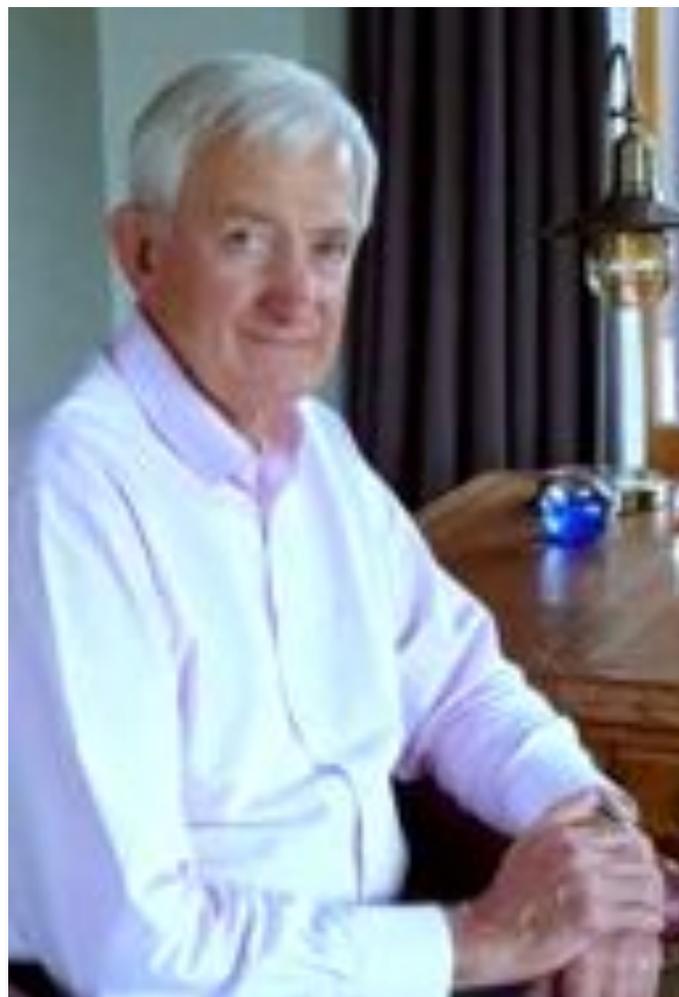
The Membership Secretary, Richard Lilley (St Albans), reported that 56 membership cards had been issued in 2019 and 41 so far in 2020. The Hampton Court Association is now up and running with 80 members. Richard is currently following 154 cathedrals and churches on Twitter and the federation is being followed by 133, and have tweeted 150 times.

The Treasurer, Michael Lake (Chelmsford), presented the annual accounts for the year ended 31st December 2019 which showed a deficit in the year of £878 compared

to a deficit the previous year of £661. This has been due mainly to the loss of income received since the magazine had been produced electronically and to the ongoing expenditure of insurance, £1515 (net) in 2019. The committee may therefore need to make a decision as to whether to increase the annual subscription to associations for 2021. The cash assets as at the end of the financial year were £8,497 compared to £9,325 the previous year.

The **2020 Festival** was due to be held in Chester in September but had to be cancelled due to Covid-19. In 2021 it is hoped to meet at Ely Cathedral from 15th to 17th October for a combined AGM and Festival.

The new Chairman, **Nick Hodges**, subsequently sent the following letter to all associations at the beginning of the New Year.



Dear Former Chorister

You are probably aware that I became Chairman of the Federation of Cathedral Old Choristers' Associations at our deferred AGM

held on-line in October. I want to take this opportunity at the start of a new year to formally introduce myself and to set out some ideas for former chorister associations and the Federation.



I have been a member of the Federation's Executive Committee for over 6 years, having guided my own association, The Guild of Ex-Choristers of the Collegiate Church of St Mary, Warwick to become affiliated to the Federation. I was a chorister at Warwick from the age of 7 for 40 years and I still have a passion for choral music and singing. I firmly believe that former chorister associations have a part to play in supporting our choral music tradition as well as recognising the importance, in terms of personal development and fellowship, membership of our respective choirs has been to all of us.

In my article for the 2020 edition of *Once a Chorister* I have expressed concerns about the challenges that face associations throughout the country. The issues of waning interest, falling membership and aging committees have been exacerbated by COVID putting paid to any physical reunions during 2020. I suggest in the article that for the Federation and, I would suggest, associations, to survive, we have to change. We have to be part of the 21st century rather than the 19th. We have to become more inclusive and we have to embrace technology. We have to encourage former girl

choristers to engage with our associations and we have to share ideas with each other.

I made a commitment on my elevation at the AGM to speak to every association affiliated to the Federation during my first year as Chairman, in the first instance to carry out a health check and discuss the challenges facing individual associations and also discuss what the Federation needs to be doing to support its members. I will be sending you, therefore, a personal email inviting you to join me and one or more of my fellow committee members to an on-line meeting using Zoom. You may also wish me to invite fellow members of your committee. Just like the distribution of the COVID vaccine, this will take a few months to complete as we have over 50 members affiliated to the Federation.

If you have not already done so, do please take a look at the e-version of the Federation's magazine, *Once a Chorister*, which may be found on our website, www.fcoca.org.uk. In the meantime, I wish you a healthy and peaceful New Year and look forward to speaking with you in 2021.

With very best wishes,
Nick Hodges, Chairman,
Federation of Cathedral Old Choristers' Associations
1st January 2021

"Extracts of Christmas reflections" (from letters and notices to the parishioners published in the St. Martin's Parish Magazines)

Revd MacNutt (Vicar of St Martin's from 1918, who became the first Provost of Leicester Cathedral in 1927) recalled that heavy rain on Christmas Day 1920 made it very hard for parishioners walking to St. Martin's to the service in the absence of trams.

He also reported that at the Carol Service in 1927, the difficulty of dealing with the distance between the choir and the organ was successfully met by using a piano in the gallery for accompanying the carols, and the nave seats were arranged so that they faced one another north-ward and south-ward. This arrangement proved most satisfactory, and it will be repeated at musical services. At this time the organ was housed in the north transept and the choir in the gallery.

FRIENDLY QUIZ: *How many of the sixteen images did you recognise? Now is the chance for you to raise money for the Cathedral's Music Foundation. For the person who submits the most complete list to the LCOCA secretaries by November 1st this year, I will personally donate £3 for each correct answer by the winner. All the buildings should be recognisable for architectural and/or historic reasons. Good luck!*

David Fisher

REMINISCENCES

As mentioned in the editor's opening message it is hoped that choristers of more recent times would like to add their recollections of happy times in the choir and of the musical skills learned, the music most enjoyed, of special services or celebrations and the people around you who made your time in the choirs so special. They don't need to be as long as the ones submitted previously so have a think and add to the corporate memories of Leicester Cathedral's musical legacy.



...and here are two photos of a similar view which will be familiar to later choristers:

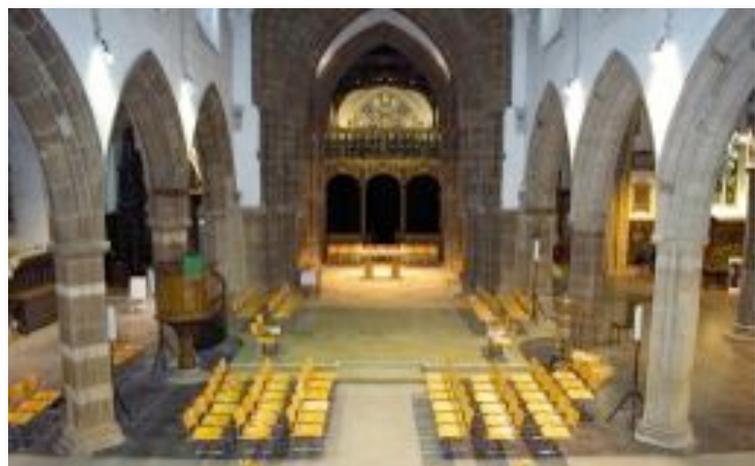
LCOCA CALENDAR 2021

Due to the current coronavirus [Covid-19] pandemic, there is still considerable uncertainty about future dates for the LCOCA. Should circumstances change you will be notified of any new dates when decisions are made as the national situation becomes clearer.

LOOKING BACK

There will be new readers to this newsletter who have missed some of the remarkable photos we have featured in previous issues. As there is a little bit of space left before we reproduce Ron Webster's fascinating article on the back page here are three taken from the gallery.

The first is of the cathedral nave in the 1960s – and that scene will be instantly recognisable to Stephen Wain and Chris Jager who you read earlier:



Spitfire Fever

Long, long ago, well, 80 years ago, the Battle of Britain was being fought in the skies over southern England. As an 8-year-old schoolboy I was thrilled by it all, especially the Spitfires and Hurricanes, and the men who flew them. I decided then that when I grew up I wanted to be a fighter pilot and fly Spitfires. I never doubted that we would win .. but my main worry was that the war would be over before I had the chance. Ah! The innocence of childhood!

In 1945 the war ended and nearly all the surviving Spitfires were scrapped. Out of the 22,000 built, only a few remain, usually in the custody of museums or wealthy private owners.



Virtually all Spitfires were single seaters, but after the war ended, Vickers Armstrong bought back a small batch of Mark 9 Spitfires and converted them to 2-seat trainers. They achieved this by adding a second cockpit, complete with controls and instruments, a few feet behind the existing one. A difficult modification which only slightly spoiled the beautiful lines of the fighter version.

One such Spitfire - PV-202, once owned by the Irish Air Corps, was



acquired by the Duxford Company 'Classic Wings' and rebuilt to a high standard. Ever since, it has been 'earning its keep' by selling the 'Spitfire Experience' to hundreds of enthusiasts .. and at the beginning of August I was fortunate enough to be able to share the experience! It is of course a very expensive flying lesson, not much change from £2,800, but to me it was worth every penny. After all, I had nurtured this ambition for 80 years!



And the Spitfire: She handles beautifully and with that lovely 12 cylinder Rolls Royce Merlin Engine she is a lively performer. At 2000 feet I was allowed to take control. What a privilege!

I flew to Newmarket, then turned north to Cambridge, then back to Duxford. Soon, over the intercom, my instructor said: "I have control, we are going to do a 'Victory Roll'. OK Ron?" My reply: "Yes please". A 360 deg roll in about 8 seconds. Unforgettable! My best flight ever! Perhaps now is the time for me to hang up my helmet and goggles?!

Ron Webster