

Federation of Cathedral Old Choristers' Associations



ONCE A CHORISTER

Year 2020

Version 1.0

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Welcome from the new FCOCA Chairman

A Manifesto for change



The Federation of Cathedral Old Choristers' Associations has stood the test of time. It has faced many challenges in its 110 year history but, on each occasion, has come through and continues to support the importance of choral music in our society and celebrates all that choir membership brings to people's lives. For how many of us has our choir membership influenced and informed our careers?

In recent years we have witnessed a falling off in attendance at AGMs and Festivals and we have experienced an increasing reluctance of Associations and "cathedrals" to offer their venues for these events. From our own personal experience and anecdotal evidence, we know many Associations are struggling to attract new members and some, in recent years, have ceased to exist due to a lack of interest. There are so many calls on everyone's time, these days, that alumni organisations come quite far down the list of "must dos",

especially if one has not maintained one's interest in the organisation's primary activity; for our members being choral music and religion.

We have expressed these views previously at AGMs and through our regular newsletters and attempted to encourage a debate on what should be done to protect the future of the Federation. Some have expressed the view that nothing needs to be done other than better promotion of the Federation and a maintenance of past values. If the Federation is to survive, I believe it has to change.

In my tenure of the Chairmanship of the Federation, I intend to do all I can to effect change that will benefit the organisation's long-term survival. The Federation (and perhaps some Associations) is seen, in some quarters, as elitist, out-dated and irrelevant. My objectives are to bring the Federation into the 21st century, make us more inclusive and provide support to our member Associations to encourage former choristers to engage with them. I am mindful that there are some very strong opinions held about the Federation and so none of the proposed changes will occur without the opportunity for full debate.

I am delighted that the Executive Committee has agreed that we will hold only one event each year and that, wherever possible, the AGM will form part of the Annual Festival, regardless of when that is held. This does not mean less engagement because, as you will see from what follows, I believe there are many more ways in which former choristers may come together to celebrate their choristership.

I have four primary objectives:

1. To change the image of the Federation and bring it into the 21st century. I will campaign for the name to be changed to the Federation of Former Chorister Associations

2. To broaden the membership of the Federation by encouraging associations representing bodies other than cathedrals and university colleges to affiliate to the Federation and to work with member associations and prospective members to grow the membership of their organisations
3. To be more active in our engagement with member Associations. To encourage the attendance of a Federation representative at Associations' events and to have regular conversations, physical or virtual between Chairmen and FCOCA representatives and the FCOCA Executive Committee
4. To become more closely involved with the Cathedral Music Trust (CMT, previously Friends of Cathedral Music FCM) and any other organisations who support the same or similar objectives to the Federation.

None of these objectives is new. They have all been suggested and discussed in the past and I do not claim them as mine but I do believe they represent a consensus that has broad support with the current Executive Committee and amongst our membership and I would now like to talk about each objective in a little more detail.

Most organisations feel the need to update every now and then; to refresh their image to bring on support from a new audience. Even chocolate giant, Cadbury, has spent hundreds of thousands of pounds this year modernising their iconic and internationally recognised brand logo. I am not suggesting anything quite as radical but I do believe it is time to move away from an image that was created in the shadow of the 19th century. Then the language of the day was very different to that which we find acceptable today. Many of the phrases used then are seen as inappropriate today and, in some cases, offensive. Most alumni organisations were, in those days, called "old boys" clubs, because that is who they wished to attract. Indeed, the word alumni has in its meaning an inference to boys, not girls. But it is the word old that I and others find offensive. The members of our affiliated associations are not "old" - though some of us would admit to being aged - and I do not believe we will attract younger people to our cause if we continue to call ourselves old choristers. When the Federation was first discussed in 1910, it was between a group of cathedral associations that proposed an organisation to bring associations together and they invited the associations of other cathedrals to join them. Later, former chorister organisations of other choral foundations, including university college choirs, were also admitted to become affiliated to the Federation. Later still, my own association, that of a parish church with a long-standing choral foundation, was the first such association to become affiliated. I believe the inclusion of "Cathedral" in our title is more limiting in our inclusivity than beneficial. I think the idea that it is, in some way, aspirational for non-cathedral organisations, is misplaced. For these reasons, I believe a name change will give us the opportunity to refresh our brand and appeal to a broader audience. I completely understand and accept that such a move brings challenges - where do we stand with the organisation's regalia, for instance? - but I do believe these issues can be overcome. Though, if accepted, we will have the word Former in our title, it is not to say we will exclude those associations who have moved to include present choristers in their membership.

I believe there are other choral organisations that have former member associations and I think they should be encouraged to become affiliated to the Federation. There is a limit, obviously, to the number of cathedrals and colleges that have choir associations and the only way we can increase our membership is to look to other choral organisations. We must also look at how we can help our existing member associations increase their membership. We can do this by sharing ideas we become aware of from other member associations who have enjoyed some success in

doing so. We can also do it by promoting the existence of the Federation nationally and the existence of our membership, that is the former chorister associations of choral foundations. We should not just assume that people who were once choristers realise that former chorister associations exist. We can do this in a variety of ways, including how we interact with other organisations that have similar objectives to those of the Federation. We must make every effort to encourage the members of the many girls' choirs that have come to exit over the past 30 years and are, generally, poorly represented in former chorister organisations, to join and engage with their own association.

I cannot expect Associations to engage with the Federation without us engaging with them. We have made great strides in the last few years in the amount of communication we have with member associations, much of which has come as a result of technology. Our regular news letters, our web site and the continued publication of *Once a Chorister*, albeit in an electronic format, have proved valuable assets. I would like to make the commitment to speak personally to every member Association over the next 12 months. We have just in excess of 50 members so I'll need to be doing one per week. I would like to be talking to the Federation Representative or Chairman of each organisation and understand the challenges faced by each Association. Video conferencing has become a normal part of daily life, partly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and I will look to use this technology for this communication. In doing so I may also be joined by either our membership officer or our development officer. I would also like to encourage member Associations to invite a member of the Federation Executive Committee to attend their events. We have a team of Regional Representatives who are willing and able to do so and I will happily make myself available.

The Cathedral Music Trust has objectives that are similar in nature to ourselves. We both exist in support of the English choral tradition though we differ in our reasons to exist. CMT is a fundraising body that provides financial support to choral foundations as well as organising gatherings of members interested in choral music. FCOCA is not a fundraising organisation but represents organisations that have as its members, people who have been (and in some cases, still are) involved in choral music. The two are complimentary. I do not believe an amalgamation of the two organisations is necessary, but a mutual co-existence brings benefits to both. By working closely together our members may benefit from events organised by CMT occurring in their region and CMT may benefit from access to a wider audience. Some of our members may already be members of CMT (through Friends of Cathedral Music) and some of their members may be former choristers who may be encouraged to join their former chorister association.

There are two further challenges that I would like to throw out to our member Associations. Firstly, I would like to encourage Associations located in the same geographical area to come together from time to time and organise their own Regional events. Perhaps a "mini-Festival" of southern cathedrals or Midlands Associations could be contemplated. Some Associations' members may very well have taken part in a three choirs' festival in the Midlands or the South and have fond memories of that time. What a thrill it might be for them to meet up again. Second, I would also like to encourage Associations to welcome into their midst former choristers who have become orphaned from their choral home, either because there being no former chorister association or because they live too far away to stay involved. This has always been part of the remit of the Federation. The original objectives of the Federation, devised in 1910, were 'To bring together individual associations into closer touch with one another and to further in every way possible the interest of these associations. The members of any association shall be received as honorary members by the association wherein they may be resident.'

The Federation is no stranger to change and I do not want to give the impression that it's been a stick-in-the-mud organisation. I am extremely mindful of all the time, effort and energy that has been given to the FCOCA by so many people in the past, all for the love of choral music and the benefits choir membership brings. In recent times, I am aware of the changes brought about by John Holt during his chairmanship, bringing the organisation up to date in its processes and procedures; Geoffrey Mitchell, during whose tenure of the Chair the Federation, tours took place, the shop was established and the membership cards were introduced; Alan Oyston, during whose time we saw the introduction of computers into our lives and the Federation embracing the internet with a website. I also thank Alan and Ian Henderson for their support of St Mary's Warwick in becoming members of the Federation, the first parish church organisation to do so; and finally, Alastair Pollard who has been our Chairman for the past 5 years and steered us successfully through some difficult waters. I follow humbly in their footsteps and hope I can maintain their vision of a successful and secure Federation.

*[Nick Hodges - Chairman, FCOCA]
October 2020*

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2020 Federation events

The 2020 Annual General Meeting of the Federation of Cathedral Old Choristers' Associations was due to be held in Rochester this year and the 2020 Festival was due to be held in Chester, but both had to be cancelled due to the Covid 19 pandemic. Fortunately, we were able to hold a video conferenced AGM using Zoom technology in early September.

Report on AGM - 12th September via Zoom

The turnout for the 2020 AGM was rather better than last year. Although the technology generated some challenges, we had between 14 and 20 attendees at various times. Reports were circulated a few days prior to the meeting so we managed to get through all the business in the 40 minutes normally allowed for a (free) Zoom video conference. Copies of these reports are included here in Once a Chorister. Alastair Pollard stood down as Chairman after his 5-year term, and Nick Hodges took over. Alastair has taken on the Federation Secretary role from his wife Nicola, and Arnold Wills has taken on the role of Vice-Chairman. A full list of the executive committee can be found towards the end of Once a Chorister.



The agenda commenced with a welcome, Federation prayer and apologies for absence. Various reports were formally submitted, and new officers elected. A discussion on printing and postage costs for Once a Chorister was deferred to the next committee meeting.

Outgoing Chairman's Report at AGM

FCOCA is struggling with recruitment and retention of members. Several member associations are down to 2 or 3 active members, and I use the word "active" loosely as some of our most ardent supporters are quite elderly. On a more positive note, we have had a number of new (albeit) tentative enquiries about joining our merry band, particularly from non-cathedrals church choirs who have a former-chorister association. One of the greatest challenges that Cathedral-standard choirs have at present is recruitment of choristers. When I was a lad I felt it was an honour to be chosen to sing in such a choir, but today there are many more conflicting calls on a child's time and their parents' finances. As I look back on my tenure as Chair of The Federation, I wonder what have been my good and bad.

For the past 5 years I have always felt it to be a great honour to be Chairman of The Federation. I loved being a chorister at Durham Cathedral and I learnt so much that I have used since then – excellent music tuition, a love of church music and architecture, Teamwork, Concentration, Professionalism, and Performance. One of the joys is attending the Federation Festivals. Being a member of FCOCA has allowed me (and you too) the opportunity to visit magnificent cathedrals, listen to superb music, and meet so many like-minded former choristers. We all have that in common. The fantastic chain of office may be a tad unwieldy to wear and a security worry when travelling, but it has helped me meet some very special people that I probably wouldn't have met elsewhere: Royalty, Bishops, Deans, Mayors, famous composers, and some fine boy and girl choristers.

I am pleased that FCOCA has been working closer with Cathedral Music Trust (CMT), Friends of Cathedral Music (FCM) and Diamond Fund for Choristers (DFcC) <https://cathedralmusictrust.org.uk/> We 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 Cathedral Music Trust to better suit the needs of the twenty-first century, and to work as an umbrella organisation for the work of FCM and DFcC. Nick Hodges, Arnold Wills and I have met senior members of CMT/FCM several times as they have kept us up to date with their new organisation, structure and aims.

Here at FCOCA, 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 FCOCA has continued to publish our magazine *Once a Chorister*, now online. 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 2021, so if you have any news or articles of interest please send them on to me. Secretary@fcoca.org.uk

Life at the top has not always been easy: GDPR and child safeguarding issues, attending funerals of many chorister friends locally and around the country, and reading the old-testament lesson from Judges with all the unpronounceable names, un-rehearsed! I was recently reminded that Durham Cathedral OCA was a founding member of The Federation, and I was the third Chairman from Durham following on from Gordon Berriman and Alan Oyston. I leave you in the capable hands of Nick Hodges who has served valiantly as my Vice-Chair for the past 5 years. I thank him particularly for his support and friendship, but also the help and support given by other members of the committee without whom I would not have been able to do the job. I shall continue to serve you and The Federation as Honorary Secretary.

Secretary's report for AGM



The 2020 AGM was due to be held in Rochester in May but had to be cancelled due to Covid-19. It was rescheduled to take place as a video conference in September. Hence this AGM today.

Since the 2019 AGM in Lichfield, the Executive committee met in Leamington Spa on 19th October 2019. We intended to meet in person in Leamington Spa on 21st March 2020, but this had to be cancelled due to Covid-19, but we managed to meet via Zoom video conferencing software on 9th May and 4th July 2020. These meetings proved very successful, so we are likely to use Zoom again. Members associations are encouraged to consider using this technology (or equivalent such as Skype, Teams, Google Meet) for their own meetings to save on travel time and costs. A Newsletter was published in August this year.

We had a highly successful festival at Portsmouth Cathedral. You can read all about it in last year's Once a Chorister Magazine on our website. Next year we hope to meet At Ely Cathedral on 15th to 17th October 2021 for a combined AGM and Festival. The 2020 Festival was due to be held in Chester in September but had to be cancelled due to Covid-19. It was decided not to reschedule for 2020 due to the uncertainty about travel restrictions and the anticipated reluctance of many to travel.

I shall be standing down now as Secretary, but may be asked to assist my successor, my husband Alastair!

[Nicola Pollard - Honorary Secretary]

Membership Secretary's report for AGM

56 membership cards were issued in 2019. 41 new (plus 1 re-issue) were issued so far in 2020. He noted that "... *there still appears to be the appetite for members to have the FCOCA membership card which I believe should be encouraged.*" The Hampton Court Association is now up and running (80 members) and we await a formal membership application. A small number of non-cathedral former chorister association have expressed an interest in joining The Federation in the medium future.

On Twitter we are currently following all cathedrals and many churches (154 in total). We are being followed by 133, and have tweeted 150 times.

[Richard Lilley - Membership secretary]

Treasurer report for AGM

Michael formally submitted the Financial statement for year ending 31st December 2019. In summary, Income was the same as last year (2018), but expenditure was £217 more than last year resulting in a deficit of £878. Full details are published in the Financial Statement document.

[Michael Lake – Honorary Treasurer]

Regional Representative Reports

Midshires and Wales

Maintaining regular contact with affiliated associations, which are usually run by a small number of individuals who, themselves, have other commitments and challenges, has, in the past, proved difficult. This year it has been doubly so because of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

I had been looking forward to attending a number of events of associations in my region this year but coronavirus put paid to any that happened, with all AGMs and reunions being cancelled. I am sure that some will have held their AGMs on-line, as the Federation is doing; I know Peterborough and my own association at Warwick, are amongst those doing so but, for many associations, because of the demographic of their membership, video conferencing is not within their skill-set. Not everyone has access to the technology or has the desire to “meet on-line”.

As a result of all this inactivity, I have nothing specific to report from the Midshires & Wales region other than a general comment about the future. What has become increasingly apparent is that many associations around the country – and not just in the Midlands – are struggling to maintain their existence. Last year we lost Birmingham as their association decided to cease and I am aware of more than one association where their committee consists of two or three individuals, now in their 70s and 80s and not enjoying the best of health and who, for very good reasons, find it difficult to continue. A small number of places have attempted to encourage former members to come together in a formal association but have found it difficult to generate sufficient interest to make it happen. On the bright side, we have heard in the last month of a parish church that maintains a choral tradition, creating a former chorister association.

I do believe that former chorister associations can be – and, indeed are in many places – of great benefit to the current choir/choral foundation and, in these financially uncertain times, a strong, vibrantly active former chorister association (including those that include present choristers) is certainly something worth nurturing. We need to find ways to encourage all those who have been members of our respective choirs to engage (or re-engage) with their chorister association and do so with the support and leadership of the current Directors of Music and their teams. I know that the Federation will be there to support in any way that it can.

[Nick Hodges – Regional Rep]

South West

Salisbury Cathedral School has a Development Committee looking at the future of the School and its requirement for new buildings which is an expensive and long-term project. The School and the Association is in good heart!

Simon Earl, the Director of Music at Christchurch Priory Dorset said that they are looking into the possibility of forming a Choir Association. I then invited Simon to look at the FCOCA website for further information. Similar enquiries have been made to William Huw the Director of Music at Bath Abbey.

[Stephen Milner – Regional Rep]

North & Ireland

Since March the pandemic brought almost total restrictions on singing by church choirs and curtailed many former chorister association events. School buildings have closed so teachers and pupils have enjoyed (or endured) virtual lessons and experienced “the joys of” music & singing lessons over Zoom! The 2020 Federation festival was due to be held in Chester in our region, but it had to be cancelled. Moreover, most former chorister associations were unable to meet in person, so there has been limited or no recent activity to report upon.

With significantly reduced visitor numbers and hence income, some cathedrals have taken the difficult decision to lay-off or furlough staff including lay clerks and in some cases their Director of music. In Sheffield, the cathedral choir has been closed totally and we await news of how choir music will feature in the future vision of their cathedral. In June, the Dean and Chapter of York Minster proposed the closure of The Minster School. Fortunately, St Peter’s School York has offered places to current chorister pupils with the same choirmaster and will become the Choir School for York Minster. York Minster’s Chapter had invested about £750,000 a year in The Minster School but this was considered too much.

Many churches and cathedrals have used technology to keep congregations involved, and I have very much enjoyed listening to services from my home Cathedral in Durham. Unfortunately, the membership of some of the Northern associations has shrunk to such an extent that they no longer meet. Recruitment is a problem for both choirs and for former chorister associations. Durham Cathedral will soon allow day-pupils to sing in the choir, not just borders. Do not despair if your association appears to be folding. It may well resurrect, albeit in a different form more suited to the “New World” we live in today rather than the “Old World” we fondly miss. Let’s hope we can soon return to singing together, or listening to choirs in a cathedral or church, meeting up with friends.

[Alastair Pollard – Regional Rep]

South East and East Anglia

It is a great pleasure to have welcomed All Saints Choir Association Kingston, Surrey as a new member to the Federation and region, in September 2019. All Saints has a renowned choral foundation and tradition, a noble pedigree, being the site of the coronation of the first King of England, Athelstan in 925 AD. Their inauguration AGM, reunion and evensong was unfortunately scuppered for some attendees by SWR failing to run a rail service to Kingston on the day. However, it was a splendid choral and instrumental event which sadly I was unable to attend, being abroad. Disappointingly the pandemic deprived us all of another visit to Rochester for the AGM and unfortunately our Festival at Chester too has had to be cancelled. Hopefully next year's Festival will go ahead in October when we return to this region at Ely. The foundation of Ely goes back to 673. The Cathedral is a thrilling blend of architectural styles, with its unique lantern and a celebrated choral tradition.

The pandemic prevented an invitation to attend an AGM, but I moved back to Norwich from North Yorkshire and am ensconced in the Cathedral Quarter, so am more 'get-at-able' for the region!

[Ayrton Westwood – Regional Rep]

Future Events

Going forward, it is expected that the AGM will not be a separate event, and will take place during the annual Festival

Ely	2021
Vacant	2022
Warwick	2023

Federation Festival - Ely 15-17 October 2021 - Provisional programme

All details are subject to change, depending on the Covid-19 situation.

Friday 15

Morning/afternoon

	Arrival, registration	Cathedral centre
1500	Federation AGM	Cathedral Centre
1600	Tea and welcome by President	South Transept
1730	Choral Evensong	Quire
1830	Civic Reception followed by buffet	Old Palace or Cathedral
2100	Compline	Lady Chapel

Saturday 16

0800	Communion	Quire
Morning	Optional tours	tbc
	Talk	
1145	Organ Recital	Cathedral
1230	Lunch	Own arrangements
	Ely Reunion Lunch	Almonry
Afternoon	Free time	
	Ely Society AGM	Cathedral Centre
1530	Rehearsal for Evensong	Octagon
1730	Festival Evensong	Octagon
1900 for 1930	Drinks	Monastic Barn
	Banquet	King's Ely
	Guest Speaker - David Pickard, (Director of the Proms)	

Sunday 17

0815	Communion	High Altar
1030	Festal Choral Eucharist	Octagon
1215	Farewell Reception	North Transept
1300	Sunday Lunch	Almonry tbc

Updated details will appear on the Federation website.

For more information please contact:

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Letter from Peter Allwood, Chairman of FCM

FCOCA and FCM have much in common and continue to work closely. Executive committee members of both organisations keep in touch through telephone calls, dedicated Zoom calls and email. Peter Allwood, chairman of FCM has taken the trouble to write directly to FCOCA.



As one who has gained so much from the musical and wider education received as a chorister in a cathedral choir, you must be very saddened by the lack of choral activity over the last eight months. The gradual return to sung services which began in England in September (but sadly not in other parts of the UK) had been hard won: when other occupations were returning to work in July, the arts, and in particular choirs, appeared to have been forgotten.

The notion that singing was a dangerous activity, liable to spread the virus, was a seed sown by anecdotal evidence many months ago from a small handful (and minuscule percentage) of choral groups across the world, and yet it seemed impossible to budge. Somehow this was a convenient misconception with which to 'kick the can' down the nave, indeed firmly outside the west doors. Cathedrals and their musicians, like so many in the arts world, were in a tough place. (At one time in Wales it was forbidden to play the organ as it was thought to be capable of spreading the virus.)

Then, after campaigns fought on many fronts, valuable research on the health hazards of singing was sanctioned, and it was announced as a result in August that singing was essentially no more of a health risk than speaking. Plans were made, and multiple risk assessments compiled, for choirs - mostly professional rather than amateur - to begin singing once more. Cathedrals, with their access to wide open spaces, were more easily able to abide by strict social distancing measures than many venues. It has been a joy to hear choirs singing live in the presence of, albeit small, congregations once more.

Unfortunately, the latest lockdown during November in England has taken live choral singing back a few paces. But this time all of the experience of the last few months has resulted in much more measured restrictions which enable a certain amount of choral activity to take place for live streaming to congregations back home. Meanwhile, sadly, very little singing is taking place in the rest of the UK.

The collapse in cathedral income during this crisis, with little prospect of a swift recovery, has left Deans and Chapters with difficult decisions. Cathedrals receive no central government funding; they have to make ends meet independently. Where Choral Foundations are supported by long-established endowments, the impact of this is somewhat reduced. Those hardest hit are cathedrals which have relied on the often very considerable income from tourism and those whose location and circumstances are always financially challenging.

Back in April, we formed the Cathedral Choirs Emergency Fund in partnership with the Ouseley Church Music Trust and the Choir Schools' Association, each organisation contributing £250,000. As I write, the Fund stands at £965,000 (including Gift Aid), tantalising in sight of our admittedly rather random £1m target. The partnership is extremely grateful to the considerable generosity of the general public to this cause.



The Cathedral Choirs Emergency Fund

please donate today to save our treasured cathedral choirs

www.fcm.org.uk

Registered UK charity no. 28521

It was a struggle back in the early summer for us to shout loud enough above the din of conflicting causes, but we have made some significant headway, particularly in gaining the agreement of match-funding by the Church Commissioners. Their remit covers the 42 Anglican cathedrals of England, and between us we have been able to subsidise the back rows of all cathedral choirs, Anglican and Roman Catholic, in Britain and Ireland for their costs through to Christmas. The Emergency Fund has now accepted applications from most cathedrals for grants to take them through the first half of next year.

Unfortunately the amount requested is three times the amount available and the partnership has a tough time deciding where the funds are needed most.

One of the remarkable aspects of this lockdown has been the extraordinary sense of unity of purpose from so many selfless people. Many composers and musical celebrities have come to our aid, giving their time and expertise without charge. The Rudolfus Foundation graciously included the Emergency Fund as one of their options at the end of their beautiful Virtual Choral Evensong in May. Norwich Cathedral was at the heart of a wonderful project to record Robert Prizeman's, *Sing Forever*, released in July. A number of Choral Scholars from cathedrals in the South-West and West compiled a Virtual Evensong, organised entirely themselves, featuring two new commissions. Now shortly to be released, lay clerks from across Britain have recorded a Virtual Compline with Roddy Williams as cantor, and three new commissions. Finally, an extraordinary performance of Bach's Toccata & Fugue in D minor played on over 50 cathedral organs will be broadcast very soon. All these are available through the Emergency Fund JustGiving site: www.justgiving.com/campaign/cathedralchoirs , and it's well worth a look.



**CATHEDRAL
MUSIC TRUST**

So, what about the future. We have recognised for some time that the Friends of Cathedral Music, for all its wonderful success over the last 64 years, requires a more robust structure and a professional team to steer its

operation if this success is to be extended and built upon. The ongoing demands of the pandemic crisis have encouraged us to bring our plans forward, and in July we launched the Cathedral Music Trust. We have appointed an Operations Director and Development Director, with other part-time staff in Administration and Communications, the latter in partnership with the Genesis Foundation. Excitingly, Harry Christophers CBE, founder and conductor of The Sixteen has agreed to join us as our President and in the new year we will launch a campaign headed by a well-known personality in the musical and broadcasting world. Our aim is to raise awareness, encourage a breadth of interest and generate further funding streams for the longer term, and thereby be an even stronger advocate for cathedral music.

The UK's cathedral choirs are performing to a higher standard and a wider audience than ever before. But they face huge challenges to maintain their long tradition of choral excellence. The pandemic crisis has strongly reinforced the view shared by many of us within the Friends that there are a growing number of singers, conductors, composers, publishers, clergy, worshippers, viewers and listeners from all walks of life who wish to see cathedral music flourish. The Cathedral Music Trust will aim to be a strong and effective voice for all those who want to see cathedral music not just survive, but evolve and flourish.

[Peter Allwood - Chairman, Cathedral Music Trust]

Chorister News

Married to Music

Whilst it is unusual in the rarefied world of organists to find married couples following the same interest, it is even rarer to find both holding the position of Director of Music at significant Anglican foundations. Oliver Hancock (OH) was appointed Director of Music at the Collegiate Church of St Mary, Warwick in 2016 and his wife, Rachel Mahon (RM), was appointed Director of Music at Coventry Cathedral in 2019. Our incoming Chairman, Nick Hodges (NH), has taken the opportunity to ask them both some questions about how they have come to be where they are.

Note: This article was compiled in the summer of 2020 whilst Oliver and Rachel were on furlough leave from their respective positions. It is hoped that by the time this issue is published, both will be back doing what they love to do most and rebuilding their respective choirs.

NH: When did you each start playing the organ and what was the motivation?

OH: My father is a church organist in West Sussex, so I grew up singing in his choirs and playing the occasional piano piece on the organ before a service. I started having lessons when I was about 13 but my first bit of service playing came about after I accidentally shut my father's fingers in a door...

RM: I started learning properly when I was 15 or so. I was enchanted by Widor's *Tocatta* ('that' one) and thought 'I'm going to learn that!'. Plus, it was an excuse to bang around and make lots of noise!

NH: When did you each first think that you might follow a career as a church organist?

It was during university for both of us. Rachel was studying for her BMus in Organ Performance at the University of Toronto and was Organ Scholar at Trinity College. Oliver took the BA in Music at Jesus College, Oxford – but only saw the light of church music after musing about various other routes including the RAF and the diplomatic corps.

NH: Who or what have been your most important musical influences?

RM: John Tuttle, who ran the choir at Trinity College while I was Organ Scholar and is University Organist for U of T. He is one of the best musicians I know, and is so generous, nurturing, and completely passionate about music. He is fantastic with a choir and has really great jokes.

OH: Certainly, my father – it's all his fault I'm in this game. When I was at the Prebendal School in Chichester, I was fortunate to watch Mark Wardell at work and he was a real inspiration, especially his phenomenal improvisations! Sarah MacDonald whipped me into shape after university and showed me what it's possible to achieve with a choir. Paul Trepte (one of my many illustrious predecessors in Warwick) has remained a regular sounding board and mentor, too.

NH: Rachel, what brought you to the UK? Oliver, what has kept you in the UK?

RM: Having held various posts in Toronto, I wanted to experience an organ scholarship at an English cathedral with the daily round of services, boy and girl choristers, and the Anglican Choral Tradition in all its glory.

OH: There are many places in the world (including Canada, of course) that 'do' the choral tradition, but few as well or as widely as in the UK. We've been very lucky to find jobs in two institutions so close together – not something to be overlooked, in the UK or elsewhere.

NH: Where and how did you meet?

It was at a job interview, actually! Neither of us got that particular job, but we got chatting over the course of the interview days, went to the pub a few times and here we are, celebrating our second wedding anniversary!

NH: What disadvantages have you discovered being in the same/similar role?

Church music jobs like ours are few and far between – geographically, too: in our early days together, Oliver was at Portsmouth Cathedral and Rachel at Chester, so the car's mileage suffered somewhat. But we're not able to attend each other's services and concerts very often; we hardly see each other over Christmas or during Holy Week; that sort of thing. Having different days off also complicates matters.

NH: What advantages come from being in the same role?

OH: We share wisdom, seek advice from each other. Both of us knowing and understanding the nature and demands of this world is great, too.

RM: I can steal Oliver's ideas...

NH: Do your respective roles bring different challenges?

OH: I think so. The administrative elements of a DoM role vary from institution to institution, and systems and structures that work for one institution don't necessarily translate to another. Recruitment is a challenge we have in common, of course, and it's useful to share ideas. However, after almost three years at Warwick, I'm beginning to feel I can (mostly) relax a bit, whereas Rachel is just about to begin...

RM: Yes, there's definitely some difference administratively and in terms of staffing. At the moment, Coventry's music department is just me and the Precentor – no Assistant, Organ Scholar, or music administrator. There are also the different demands of a cathedral set up versus that of a parish church (even one with such a tradition and reputation as St Mary's). However, our shared experiences bring appreciation of the different aspects of our roles.

NH: Do you share/discuss ideas on repertoire over supper?

Often! It can be concert programmes – choral and our own solo organ recitals – or liturgical. It's particularly good to explore some Canadian repertoire that isn't so well known in the UK.

NH: Are there areas where you might collaborate in the future?

Absolutely. Our respective boys and men sang Evensong in January this year, and we hope to make it a regular occurrence. We may even branch out into less musical activities – diocesan football league, perhaps? Watch this space!

Rachel Mahon is Director of Music at Coventry Cathedral, where she trains and conducts the Cathedral Choir and runs the music programme. She was Assistant Director of Music from 2018-2020 and prior to this, she was Assistant Organist at Chester Cathedral where she worked regularly with the Cathedral Choir.

Rachel was Organ Scholar at St Paul's Cathedral in London, England from 2014-2016, and made history as the first female organist on staff in its 1400-year history. As one of the full-time organists, she gave recitals and regularly played and conducted for services, working with the world-famous Cathedral Choir in the daily cycle of worship as well as services of National significance.



She combines life as a cathedral musician with a busy international recital schedule. Recent and upcoming engagements include an opening concert for the Montreal Symphony; Royal Canadian College of Organists' National Convention 2016; Orgelsommer Festivals 2016 & 2017, Lüneburg, Germany; The Toronto Bach Festival 2018; Haderslev Cathedral, Denmark; and the Lichfield Festival. Rachel's debut solo album, featuring all Canadian music on the organ of Coventry Cathedral, was released to excellent reviews – it received five stars in *Choir & Organ* and was *Gramophone Magazine* Editor's Choice in March 2020.

Rachel has won numerous awards and competitions in Canada, including a graduating scholarship from the Faculty of Music, University of Toronto and the Godfrey Hewitt Memorial Scholarship from the Royal Canadian College of Organists. She holds a Bachelor of Music degree in Organ Performance from the University of Toronto, where she studied with Professor John Tuttle and since moving to the UK, she has studied with Henry Fairs at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. Whilst pursuing her degree, Rachel was the Bevan Organ Scholar at Trinity College, Toronto, as well as the Principal Organist at Timothy Eaton Memorial Church. She has also held organ scholarships at St James Cathedral, Toronto and Truro Cathedral, UK. In 2014, she was named one of the top 30 musicians under 30 in Canada by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

In 2012, Rachel and fellow organist Sarah Svendsen founded the duo *Organized Crime* and the two organists aim to entertain audiences with their music and crazy antics. The pair have toured across Canada many times and performed in the opening concert of the Montreal Organ Festival in 2017 and at the RCCO National Convention in Halifax in 2019. For details of upcoming shows and other information, visit www.organizedcrimeduo.com and www.rachelmahon.co.uk



Oliver Hancock is Director of Music at the Collegiate Church of St Mary, Warwick, having previously held posts at Portsmouth and Ely Cathedrals. He was Organ Scholar at Jesus College, Oxford, and was one of the first students to take the MMus in Choral Studies degree at the University of Cambridge in 2010.

From 2008 to 2012, Oliver was Assistant Organist to Ely Cathedral Girls' Choir, where he accompanied regular cathedral services and helped to train the girl choristers. During this time he accompanied ECGC on their first tour to Paris, their fifth-anniversary broadcast of *Choral Evensong* on BBC Radio 3, and their CD *Penitence & Redemption* (Regent Records). For the academic year 2011-12, Oliver was also Graduate Organ Scholar at Selwyn College,

Cambridge, recording a CD of music by Alan Bullard – *Wondrous Cross* (Regent Records) – and undertaking a tour of the East coast of the USA, where venues included St Thomas 5th Avenue and the Cathedral of St John the Divine in New York, and the National Cathedral in Washington DC.

Sub-Organist at Portsmouth Cathedral and School Organist at The Portsmouth Grammar School until Christmas Day 2017, Oliver accompanied daily services and worked with the boy and girl choristers, as well as undertaking outreach work across the diocese. In 2013, he directed the girl choristers and scholars on tour in Malta and Gozo, and in a tour of Italy in July 2015, which included an award-winning performance as part of the Florence International Choirs Festival, and accompanied the commissioning service of the aircraft carrier HMS Elizabeth II, in the presence of Her Majesty The Queen.

At Warwick, Oliver is responsible for the musical life of St Mary's Church, recruiting, training and conducting the choirs of boys, girls, and men in services and concerts both in Warwick and further afield. He also directs the Church's choral society 'Collegium', and is Choral Director at King's High School, Warwick's independent girls' school.

As well as the USA, Oliver has toured much of mainland Europe, both as conductor and organist, and has broadcast live on BBC One television, and BBC Radio 3 and 4. He remains an active recitalist, performing recently in Westminster Cathedral, London, Lichfield and Chester Cathedrals, St James' Cathedral in Toronto, in and around Milan, and Kerpen in Germany. Oliver is an Examiner for the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, and a Fellow of the Royal College of Organists.

Magdalen Choir Oxford – Virtual May Morning

This was sent in by Andrew Long, a Leicester Cathedral OC.

One of the great traditions in Oxford is that of May Morning, the time when the city celebrates the coming of Spring. Of course it wasn't the same, but it was touching nevertheless. Since time immemorial the boy choristers and lay clerks of Magdalen College, Oxford have climbed the college's great tower at 6am on May 1 and sung to a vast crowd of (usually tired and tipsy) revellers below welcoming the rising sun. In former years that was followed by mass diving into the river from Magdalen Bridge, but the police have discouraged that in these more safety-conscious times. The occasion typically attracts crowds of thousands of people to the High Street below, bringing together Oxford's communities to enjoy dancing, singing and revelry, and to listen to the Choir from the foot of the Tower.

None of that was possible this year, with the world shouting "mayday" rather than "May Day". So instead, for early risers everywhere, the choir — cheerily led by Mark Williams, Magdalen's "informer choristarum" (choirmaster to you and me) — put together and streamed a virtual May Morning. We had birdsong, we had a mighty peal of bells, we had videos of celebrations in earlier years. And, most importantly, we had the choir singing the traditional two items, but with each member separately recorded at home and the tracks expertly layered together.

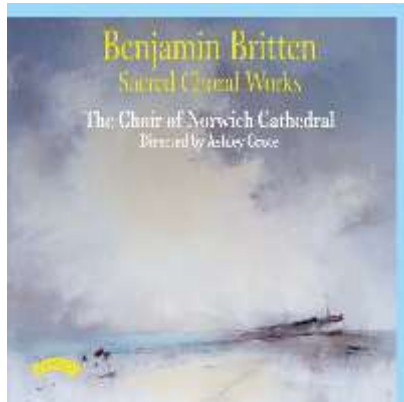
Blend and ensemble weren't perfect, as you might expect, but there was spirit and warmth in the singing, and more resonance (artificially applied, of course) than you get on the top of a tower on a chilly May morning. As for the music, it was the traditional double bill of solid sacred followed by saucy secular. The Hymnus Eucharisticus by Benjamin Rogers, one of Williams's 17th-century predecessors, is a lugubrious refrain; it's no surprise that its charms have never travelled much beyond Magdalen's walls. On the other hand, Thomas Morley's part song Now is the Month of Maying is one of the light-footed delights of Elizabethan music. "Fie then! why sit we musing, youth's sweet delight refusing?" its last verse starts. Well, chance would be a fine thing! Let's hope there's less musing and more sweet delight next May Day.



The choir in happier times

Norwich Cathedral

Like every other Cathedral in the country, most of our plans for 2020 were dashed by the sudden onslaught of COVID-19. Projects that were going to be highlights fell by the wayside: a performance of Bach's *St Matthew Passion*, a collaboration with the BBC Singers in the Aldeburgh Festival and – perhaps most unusually – the arrival of Dippy, the Natural History Museum's touring dinosaur, which was due to be in the Cathedral nave from July until October. For this extraordinary project, we had commissioned Bob Chilcott to compose a piece which was to have been performed multiple times by the Cathedral Choir alongside literally hundreds of Primary School children. Fortunately, it looks like this will now go ahead in March 2021, albeit with many fewer children due to the necessary social distancing.



We were immensely fortunate that in February, before coronavirus, we recorded a new disc of sacred choral works by Benjamin Britten, including pieces that have a particular link to Norfolk – namely the *Ceremony of Carols* (first performed in Norwich Castle), the *Hymn to St Peter* (composed for the quincentenary of St Peter Mancroft, Norwich) and the *Hymn to the Virgin* (written whilst Britten was still a pupil at Gresham's school). This was released at the start of October on the Priory Records label and has been well received, at a time when all of us have suffered a dearth of good music!

As Master of Music I was tremendously grateful to have been able to continue working throughout lockdown, continuing regular sessions online with the boy and girl choristers as well as our Cathedral children's choir. Now that the choir is able to sing together again in person, I realise just how valuable this online contact was. Whilst rehearsals via 'zoom' are in no way a substitute for real music-making, they did provide a lifeline in maintaining the sense of camaraderie, community and human relationship which is so vital to the life of any cathedral choir.

The boys and girls in the choir enjoyed various other online activities to keep their spirits up, including a virtual 'bake-off', judged by the Dean and Bishop of Norwich together. There were some extraordinarily creative and complex entries, including one of the Cathedral organ being played by the aforementioned Dippy the dinosaur!





Our music department in Norwich, through the initiative of Canon Precentor Aidan Platten and the technical expertise of Assistant Organist George Inscoe, was able to facilitate the *Sing Forever* project, which involved some 269 choristers from Cathedral and Collegiate Choirs across the country, singing together in a virtual performance to raise money for the Friends of Cathedral Music (now Cathedral Music Trust) Emergency Fund. Back in Norwich, like many choirs, we did a number of virtual recording projects with our own choristers, contributing to the Cathedral's digital worship offering.

After such a long period of absence, it has been incredibly uplifting to return to choral singing this September. It is not, of course, 'normal' – the choir are singing only in the nave with social distancing in place and, whilst they are doing the most impressive job, the choristers are missing that sense of togetherness that comes from standing shoulder-to-shoulder in the choir stalls. However, if COVID-19 has taught us nothing else, it is the realisation of just how blessed we all are to be able to make beautiful music together at all in the very special space that is Norwich Cathedral. Conscious of all those musicians who are still unable to return to the work that they love and depend on, we will continue to strive to uphold our choral tradition to the best of our ability, whatever the challenges of the present times.

[Ashley Grote – Master of Music at Norwich Cathedral]

Westminster Abbey

Little did we know at the start of the year that choral and liturgical life would be brought to a sudden and complete standstill at roughly the half-way point by the coronavirus pandemic. The year started very promisingly. Having bidden farewell to an outstanding group of leaving choristers in the summer, the annual task of building the 'new' choir began energetically and with great optimism. The first major event of the Michaelmas term was a festival in mid-October marking the 750th anniversary of the consecration of the present Abbey Church - the stunning Gothic edifice constructed in the thirteenth century at the instigation of Henry III to house a new shrine for the sainted King Edward ('the Confessor'). Recent events at the Abbey had built towards this: the opening of the new Queen's Diamond Jubilee Galleries in the East Triforium, and the dedication of David Hockney's new stained-glass window in the North Transept.

The festival of anniversary events did not disappoint. The Abbey Choir, together with members of our instrumentalist partners St James's Baroque, gave a private recital for supporters of a selection of music strongly associated with the Abbey. A splendid anniversary service, in the presence of HM The Queen, included a newly commissioned festival anthem, *In the midst of thy temple*, by Matthew Martin. Then came the usual liturgical celebrations of the Dedication of the Abbey Church, including a joint Evensong with the Choir of Westminster Cathedral. The anniversary festival marked the end of the tenure of our Dean, Dr John Hall, for whom there were several valedictory events and services. Among many other attributes, he had been hugely encouraging and supportive of the Abbey's music and it was good to have an opportunity to thank him. Dr Hall commissioned a new anthem by David Bednall, *O what their joy*, which the choir sang at his last Eucharist. Two weeks later his successor, Dr David Hoyle, formerly Dean of Bristol, was installed and welcomed. Later in November it was the Abbey's turn to host the annual Festival of St Cecilia, sung jointly by the choirs of St Paul's, Westminster Cathedral, and the Abbey, for which Bob Chilcott had composed an attractive new setting of Angel voices ever singing. The period leading up to Christmas was as full and varied as ever, with a concert performance of Handel's *Messiah* and a special performance by the choristers of Britten's *A Ceremony of Carols*.

2020 started optimistically. In early March The Queen and other members of the Royal family attended the annual Commonwealth Day service which was televised live. The following week we began to record a new Hyperion CD of music by Judith Weir, Jonathan Dove and Matthew Martin. We were in the middle of doing so when services were brought to a sudden halt, the boys were sent home, and the Abbey Church had to be closed to the public. In common with everyone else, all our exciting plans for the rest of the academic year have had to be put on hold or dropped altogether. The boys have had a full term of 'remote' learning, including regular choral sessions in various formats with me and colleagues in which we have tried to keep the boys fully in touch with the Abbey and with their sense of being choristers. This is not easy when you are not able to sing in the choir with your colleagues! But I have been proud of the positive way in which they have engaged with these unusual and unwished for circumstances. Fortunately we were able to invite back our five leaving choristers, with their families, for a private service of valediction (socially distanced and liberally sanitised) and to thank them and wish them well in person. We also thanked our outgoing organ scholar, Alexander Hamilton, and wished him every success in his new post as Assistant Director of Music at Wells Cathedral.

[James O'Donnell - Organist & Master of the Choristers Westminster Abbey]

Wells Cathedral

Wells Cathedral Choir Association

As with other Associations no doubt, it was with great sadness that we were forced to cancel our planned Wells Cathedral Choir Association (WCCA) annual reunion on 25 April 2020 as a result of the Covid -19 pandemic.

For the current Cathedral choir It's been a year unlike any other and for the Choral Tradition as a whole, and hopefully one that won't be repeated. On 17 March, when it became clear that the Choir wouldn't be able to sing together for a while. As a temporary farewell, the Choristers, Sub-Assistant Organist David Stevens and the Master of the Choristers, Jeremy Cole made a hasty video recording of Gary Davison's O Lord, support us all the day long – the text of which took on a particular poignancy that day.

There followed much thought about how the Choristers could continue during the pandemic, to carry their musical education, to keep in touch with them and make sure the community was still alive, and also to provide some sort of musical offering to those people who would miss coming into the Cathedral each day to be involved in choral services. Small virtual group sessions working on the technical aspects of singing, and learning bits and pieces of repertoire, were quite successful. The Choristers also made two virtual recordings, one of which was of a hymn for Easter Day and was well-received by our online community. The other, of Peter Hurford's Litany to the Holy Spirit, was released to mark Pentecost.

Nearly six months later, the time finally arrived when the Choir was able to return to singing again. This was extremely welcome news, but inevitably it is not 'business as usual' quite yet given the need to provide a safe environment for all of the singers and music staff in the midst of Covid-19. Following government guidelines and professional recommendations, the Choristers and the Vicars Choral are singing in two separate groups for the time being. There are 15 Choristers and 6 Vicars Choral in each choir, and they split the singing of services between them.

The first Evensong back was on Saturday 5 September, at 5.15pm and Wells was one of the first, if not the first Cathedral choir to sing at Cathedral services. There have inevitably been many Covid-related logistical challenges to do with rehearsals, copies of music, robes and many other things!

With the anniversary of the end of WW2 on 15th August it was time to remember three Wells Cathedral choristers who were killed in the war:

Flight Lieut. Selwyn Henry Alcock DFC, 83 Sqdn., Bomber Command Pathfinder Force, RAFVR, killed 27/01/1944 (age 24). WCS 1930-36. (photographs of Flight Lieut. Alcock below)



Trooper Leslie Sidney Donald Dowell, 13th/18th Royal Hussars (Queen Mary's Own), RAC, killed 29/08/1944 (age 20). WCS 1933-39.

Leading Aircraftman Harry Edward Taylor, 4 Elementary Flight Training School, RAFVR, killed 12/09/1940 (age 18). WCS 1934-39.

We are now planning our next WCCA reunion which is currently planned for 24 April 2021. However we appreciate that this may still not be possible and we may have to postpone until later in the year.

[Chris Seaton - Chair WCCA]

A Message from the Director of Music Jeremy Cole

Greetings to all our supporters! It's been a year unlike any other for the Cathedral Choir, and for the Choral Tradition as a whole, and hopefully one that won't be repeated. Many of you will have followed our online offerings during lockdown, and we thank you for your engagement with those. It was way back on 17 March that it became clear the Choir wouldn't be able to sing together for a while. As a temporary farewell, the Choristers, Sub-Assistant Organist David Stevens and I made a hasty video recording of Gary Davison's O Lord, support us all the day long – the text of which took on a particular poignancy that day.



There followed much thought about how the Choristers could continue during the pandemic, to carry their musical education, to keep in touch with them and make sure the community was still alive, and also to provide some sort of musical offering to those people who would miss coming into the Cathedral each day to be involved in choral services. The Choristers and I continued to meet regularly via Zoom, which was a very useful way of being able to see and hear them. There were some frustrations along the way, thanks to unreliable internet, technical glitches and the rest - any attempt at ensemble singing quickly collapsed in chaos! However, small group sessions working on the technical aspects of singing, and learning bits and pieces of repertoire, were quite successful. The Choristers also made two virtual recordings, one of which was of a hymn for Easter Day and was well-received by our online community. The other, of Peter Hurford's Litany to the Holy Spirit, was released to mark Pentecost.



Nearly six months later, the time has finally arrived when the Choir can return to singing again. This is extremely welcome news, but unfortunately it won't be 'business as usual' quite yet, as we have to do everything we can to provide a safe environment for all our singers and music staff in the midst of Covid-19. Following government guidelines and professional recommendations, the Choristers and the Vicars Choral will be singing in two separate groups for the time being. There will be 15 Choristers and 6 Vicars Choral in each choir, and they will split the singing of services between them.

Our first Evensong back will have both choirs present in the Cathedral, but singing separately from two ends of the building. Within the choirs, the singers will all be spaced 2 metres apart, with their seats in an interlocked formation to prevent anyone singing over anyone else. There have also been many Covid-related logistical challenges to do with rehearsals, copies of music, robes and many other things! This will be our 'new normal' for the time being, and I'm sure we will adjust quickly and enjoy making music together again. After such a long time away, it will be a joy to restart our great tradition, and hopefully it will be too long before the Choir can all sing with one voice once again.

Chorister Trust - New Patron David Morgan-Hewitt.



I am absolutely delighted to have been asked to become a Patron of the Wells Cathedral Chorister Trust. Many years ago, I was a cathedral chorister at Norwich and choral music and Cathedral worship have been part of my life from a very early age. Having moved to Wells from London a couple of years ago I am now so privileged to live in The Rib - a fabulous mediaeval canonical house with the Chapter House in our front garden and The Lady Chapel in the back garden. I am so spoilt as I can sit in our back garden and hear the choir singing in the cathedral - sounding even better if I pop next door!

Cathedral Choirs cost money and the WCCT exists to raise funds to help those ever-increasing financial demands. If the pandemic and the closure of our cathedrals has taught us anything, it is that without our fabulous choir Wells Cathedral is not whole. Having the choir back will be one of the most exciting things to have happened in years. I am thrilled to be associated, in a very small way, with this incredible organisation.

Personally, I have never forgotten the amazing start in life I was given by being accepted into a cathedral choir. It was pure luck that I had a voice worth listening to, but it was much more than luck that I had a place at Norwich Cathedral. It was the commitment and generosity of the Dean and Chapter and the many supporters of the choir that made my childhood so rich and happy.



Salisbury Cathedral

This year's report follows a highly unusual year for our Cathedral and its musicians. September 2019 saw some changes of personnel with our Organ Scholar, Alex Palotai, taking up the post of Assistant Organist at Chester Cathedral. We welcomed his successor, Samuel Bristow, as Organ Scholar here in that same month, and Sam has now left us to take up the organ scholarship at St Paul's Cathedral. At the same time, George Richford took over directorship of the Cathedral Chamber Choir, John Challenger having relinquished this particular role.

Advent and Christmas were, as usual, highly active periods, beginning with the three 'From Darkness to Light' processions. The Chorister Bishop for 2019 was Eva Akerman and during her special Evensong she preached a most thoughtful sermon. A selection of our choristers also took part in a polished Salisbury Musical Society performance of Britten's timeless classic, St Nicolas. We broadcast a carol service for BBC Wiltshire, and sang 'Carols by Candlelight' to packed congregations, alongside the ever-popular sequence of services on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Our Choral Foundation Concerts continued to offer a wide variety of performances in aid of the Cathedral's music. The ever-popular December performances of Messiah, accompanied by the City of London Sinfonia, have become an annual highlight, and in November 2019, the choir gave a moving performance of music for Remembrance-tide, including Fauré's Requiem. In the Diocese of Salisbury we continued to offer regular concerts, and we have recently visited Fovant, Beaminster, Silton and Moreton.

At the start of 2020, the restoration of our great 'Father' Willis organ gathered momentum and the work was finished by mid-February. During the absence of the Cathedral organ a digital organ had been in use, and many inventive musical projects were undertaken, including several Bach Cantata Evensongs, and the Epiphany Procession which featured Parts V and VI of Bach's Christmas Oratorio, accompanied by distinguished Baroque instrumentalists. The 'Father' Willis organ was brought back into use at Evensong on 24 February 2020, and we were able to enjoy it in all its glory for a few weeks before the year took the strangest turn. The last Evensong to be sung by the Cathedral Choir prior to the 'lock-down' was on Monday 16 March, all rehearsals and services being suspended the following day. The resulting closure of all religious buildings meant that the choir missed out on singing in Elgar's The Apostles, Bach's St John Passion and the services during Palm Sunday, Holy Week and Easter Day. The Cathedral's 800th Anniversary celebrations and a large organ festival were both prevented by these measures, though the newly-restored organ can be heard via a new CD – Organ Prom. This is available in the cathedral shop and on the website.

This has been a worrying period for choirs up and down the land, and the necessary measures to halt the spread of Covid-19 have brought particular sadness for our Year 8 choristers, who were never able to sing their final service before moving on to new schools. We have been delighted to be able to resume singing in some form as I write (September 2020), though this has come with severe restrictions, social distancing, and a reduced choir schedule. We will rebuild things over time, and as government and Church of England guidance allows. Prior to the lock-down the Cathedral Junior Choir was flourishing and the Cathedral Youth Choir had grown enormously. We hope that these will be able to resume before too long. I would like to end on a positive note so I take this opportunity to thank all of you who support the cathedral's musicians in many different ways. Let us trust that the time ahead will be easier than this present time.

[David Halls - Director of Music]

Christ Church Cathedral Oxford

The Coronavirus pandemic has of course affected the Choirs associated with Christ Church Cathedral School profoundly, but importantly, we have kept singing throughout.

Michaelmas Term 2019 started off with the joyful news that a new treble line had been formed to serve the Chapel of Pembroke College Oxford, physically our nearest college just on the other side of Brewer Street. Ten trebles were selected to form the new choir to sing alongside the undergraduate sopranos and other members of the College Choir and before March's lockdown occurred, Pembroke College Chapel echoed to the sound of boys' voices. The formation of this choir meant that we returned to the situation which pertained in the early 1990s when we were a School educating three college choirs. At that time Exeter College decided they no longer wished to have a treble line. With the establishment of the Pembroke choir, we again become the only choir school in England providing choirs to three institutions.

Thomas Allery, the outstanding director of the Worcester Choir moved to become the Assistant Director of Music at the Temple Church in London. Very happily in the circumstances, his place was taken for the final two terms of the academic year by Stephen Darlington, former Organist of Christ Church Cathedral. It has been a joy to see Stephen working with boys from the School again.

With the onset of lockdown, all three of our choirs continued to rehearse online with regular sessions occurring several times a week using Zoom. This seemed to work more effectively than might have been imagined even if it was not anything like the real thing, primarily because everyone was (in essence) singing a solo in their own home. Nonetheless all our boys maintained their singing. The Pembroke choristers joined the Cathedral choristers for a rehearsal with Professor Grahl twice a week. In the case of the Cathedral choristers, all the boys received individual singing tuition from a member of choir and one of the organists, amounting to 70 minutes of individual tuition each week, in addition to daily short morning sessions.

Both the Cathedral and the Worcester choirs put together virtual performances of pieces both of which were extraordinarily moving in the circumstances.

I am writing in October 2020. At the time of writing, the Cathedral choir has gone back to singing regular services in the North Transept, though the trebles are separated from the backrows by plastic screens. The choristers can sing together as they exist already in a boarding house bubble. Both our other choirs are rehearsing in a socially distanced manner and the Worcester choir is hoping, lockdown allowing, to sing in St Barnabas Church, Jericho, the College Chapel being too small to do so safely there. The same restriction is true for the Pembroke choristers, their chapel being even smaller.

Singing has been going on here for almost 500 years and I am delighted to say that it is continuing to do so now, despite Coronavirus.

[Gordon Hughes - Christ Church Oxford Cathedral School Old Boys Association]

Ely Cathedral

Society of Ely Choristers

Because of the Covid epidemic this year's Reunion was cancelled and it was not possible to produce a yearbook. We hope and pray that next year things will be back to normal. However 2021 will be different, for we have agreed to host the Federation Festival over the weekend of 17-19 October, and that event will be combined with our own Reunion. The guest speaker at the Festival Banquet on the Saturday evening will be David Pickard, an Ely Chorister from 1970-73, who is Director of the BBC Proms. Further information about this event will be published over the next few months. Peter North has retired as Secretary and Editor of the Yearbook, and we thank him for his dedicated service in those posts for a number of years. Tristan Harding, by far the youngest member of the committee, succeeded Peter as Secretary.

The Charles Bush Memorial Award and Melody Day Prize were awarded to Nelson Cuthbert-Jacques and Alexandra Bowerman for their outstanding contributions to their respective choirs. This year's awards go to Max Hatten and Ivana Peat. The Society donated £400 towards the purchase of sixty copies of the first volume of the 'Anthology of Sacred Music by Women Composers', a collection of anthems in four parts, including Sarah MacDonald's 'Crux Fidelis', written for Passiontide. The annual Act of Remembrance was held on the Saturday before Armistice Day,

The choirs sang superbly throughout the first two terms, and especially so over Christmas. We were looking forward to hearing them at Easter, but by then the cathedral was closed. Among the many casualties of the lockdown were the Easter Breakfast and the end of academic year services. The latter cancellations meant that we were unable to say 'Farewell' to Nelson Cuthbert-Jacques, Emily Williams, Grace Curcio, Alice Fisher and Solomon Boon, who would have left the cathedral choirs and be admitted to the Society and Federation in July. We wish them well in their future education and careers. On the day before lockdown Edmund Aldhouse and Glen Dempsey spent many hours recording organ music which was played during the online services which took place before the partial resumption of normal services. At the time of writing the future is uncertain; we look forward to the day when all the Cathedral's services and activities can resume, though I suspect that not everything will be exactly as it was before March.

It is with great sadness that we record the deaths of three supporters of the Cathedral and our choirs: Keith Ellinor, Roger Firkins and Eileen Stubbings. Between them their support totalled well over 150 years.

[John Marshall – Chairman Society of Ely Choristers]

Ely Cathedral Girls' Choir

The year began with Emily Williams and Grace Curcio being installed as Head and Deputy Head of Etheldreda House, heading up a full house with every dorm filled with choristers, including all the girls from years 7 through 13! Three of the year 12 girls were welcomed as Sixth Form Choral Scholars, along with two Sixth Form boys. Highlights of the Michaelmas Term included our own stall at the Christmas Fayre, raising money for our first choir tour in many years, experimenting

well before it was necessary with socially-distanced singing by spreading out all over the octagon during the Advent Procession, an amazing, though tiring trip to London to sing for the NSPCC carol service in Holy Trinity Sloane Square, where the celebrity guests included Alison Steadman (Pam from the BBC comedy 'Gavin and Stacey'), and our annual Ceremony of Carols to end the term.

Early in the Lent Term we gave a tour fund-raising concert in the beautiful Barcham Hall, where the Ceremony had another outing, this time for Candlemas. We also performed a wonderful set of pieces for upper voices and harp by the contemporary composer Richard Peat. Two weeks later we recorded Peat's music for a commercial CD with Regent Records, which will be released in 2021.

Towards the end of term Miriam Reveley, the cathedral's first female Organ Scholar, passed the examination for Colleague of the Royal College of Organists - an outstanding achievement for someone of school age. Miriam also won all the available prizes awarded for the exam.

The term ended with a wonderful 'Etheldreda Entertains' concert, and we then had a few days respite before the Holy Week stayover and the much-anticipated tour to Amsterdam.

Of course, those things didn't happen -- and neither did the whole of the Summer Term, including the hard work leading up to exams, and the wonderful celebrations, services and farewells afterwards, which are such an important part of the ECGC year. We did manage to sing 'Coe Fen' one last time -- everyone recorded it singing into their phones, and Maccy knitted it all together into one big virtual choir. You can watch it here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZEEaCUR44Fo>. It was an unsatisfactory way to sing together, but it was better than nothing.

We were excited to welcome three new Year 7 girls to the fold at the start of the Michaelmas Term. Let's hope that this year will be a little bit more 'routine'....

[Sarah MacDonald - Director of Ely Cathedral Girls' Choir]

Ely Cathedral Boys Choir

The academic year 2019-2020 did not turn out quite as hoped, but there was much to celebrate before the world was turned upside-down. The choir continued to make steady progress throughout the Michaelmas Term, culminating in a splendid Christmas. The arrival of my new Assistant, Glen Dempsey, was a joy, and we were also happy to welcome our new Tenor Lay Clerk, Sam Madden.

The Lent Term started well, with superb singing at Epiphanytide and Candlemas. By late February things were changing, but the boys and Lay Clerks were able to undertake a short tour to Paris immediately before the lockdown. I'm glad that the choir was able to enjoy a carefree weekend in that most carefree of cities before the COVID storm broke around us. After Paris it rapidly became clear that we were unlikely to make it to the end of term. The sudden failure of the organ blower during Monday Evensong did not augur well. With the suspension of public worship the following day, and the inevitable school closure, the writing was on the wall. For the first time since the Restoration, the unstoppable machine that is Ely Cathedral Choir had shuddered to a complete halt.

The immediate priority was devising a scheme to keep the boys singing, connected with each other, and in touch with the routines and traditions which make choristership so special. At first we thought that the curriculum would need to be theory and listening based. However, music teachers worldwide soon reported that teaching online was possible, and infinitely preferable to no teaching at all. My initial scepticism was quickly dispelled: it would be possible to keep the choristers singing throughout the summer term, and by late April we were ready to start up the machine once more. We quickly established a rhythm with each chorister, combining work on new repertoire with reinforcement of basic skills. Each boy received a weekly lesson from me or Glen, as well as taking part in group sessions with other boys. All continued to receive a weekly lesson from either Peter North or Vanessa Scott. Their input was crucial in keeping the choristers vocally healthy and motivated. We deliberately shied away from too much familiar repertoire. My priority was to discover new pieces, and thereby to continue working on the boys' musicianship and theory skills. There was a deliberate focus on non-sacred repertoire: for a solitary 9-year old, fine and imaginative songs by Benjamin Britten, Nico Muhly and Jonathan Dove are infinitely more fun than the top line of a setting or anthem completely divorced from its context. Our first online Evensong, ("EvenZoom") threw up perplexing technical challenges, but we quickly overcame these. Each service was sung almost entirely to plainsong, with each boy taking a line at a time. Despite the physical distance, a real sense of a prayerful act of worship quickly emerged. The boys also participated in several virtual choir videos, including their own recording of Ben Parry's Ely Magnificat, which can be seen on YouTube. These allowed them to demonstrate the progress made during lockdown: every single chorister advanced in musical independence and confidence.

At the time of writing, the clouds have begun to part; new guidelines made it possible for the choir to reconvene, and we have successfully executed a phased return. The boys sound as though they were never away, and if anything their confidence and esprit de corps have emerged strengthened in a remarkable way. They are an amazing team, and it will take more than COVID-19 to silence them!

[Edmund Aldhouse – Director of Music]

A tribute to Arthur William Wills

Arthur Wills OBE, who was born in Coventry on 19 September 1926, died peacefully in Ely on 30 October 2020. He was Organist and Director of Music at Ely Cathedral from 1958 to 1990.

He was educated at St John's School, Coventry and the College of St Nicolas (RSCM), Canterbury. After spells at St Alban's Church, Leamington Spa and St Mary's Collegiate Church, Warwick, he was appointed assistant organist and tenor Layclerk at Ely Cathedral in 1949. Arthur became Organist and Choirmaster in 1958, a position he held until his retirement in 1990, the year in which he was appointed OBE. After his retirement Arthur was a generous and unstinting supporter of Ely Cathedral's music, and a much-loved member of the Cathedral community, attending Sunday services until early this year, and enjoying attending Choristers' Society events. In 1951 Arthur was awarded The Archbishop's Diploma in Church Music. From 1953 to 1965 he was Director of Music at The King's School Ely, and he held a professorship at the Royal Academy from 1964 to 1992. Arthur obtained BMus and DMus degrees from Durham University, and FRCO and CHM diplomas from the RCO.



Arthur Wills was a monumental personality in the world of Church music, even if his outstanding contribution was arguably eclipsed to some extent by some other “long stay” cathedral organist contemporaries of his. In Ely he will surely remain something of an iconic figure.

The music library at Ely overflows with Arthur’s immense output of choral works which is well matched by a huge volume of very effective organ music. Much, though not all, of his output has been published. Arthur’s music displays a very strong French influence; that of Duruflé, Langlais, and Messiaen in particular. As a performer Arthur was especially active in encouraging the playing of Messiaen’s music; he toured extensively as a recitalist in Europe, North America, Australia, New Zealand, and Hong Kong. He broadcasted and appeared on TV and made many recordings, both as a soloist and with the Ely Choir.

A large selection of Arthur’s music was kept in the Ely Cathedral Choir repertoire after he retired, and a good deal of it was commercially recorded at Ely: “Full of Wills” (Guild GMCD 7315) and “The Praise of the Trinity” (Herald HAVPCD 197) are good

examples (<https://www.elycathedral.org/music/tours-and-recordings/choir-recordings>). Perhaps his most frequently performed piece these days is the fine Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis. This fine setting perfectly captures the special mystery of Ely Cathedral and shows Wills composing at the height of his powers.

Arthur was incredibly kind to Sally and me when we arrived in Ely. We will for ever be appreciative of the way he and his lovely wife, Mary, managed the “handover”. He was always incredibly supportive and positive; he never “got in the way” or made negative comments about the new regime after I succeeded him. The care and love which Arthur lavished on Mary, to whom he was married for almost 62 years, when she became so infirm in her later years merits at least as much admiration as his contribution to English Cathedral music. Veronica Lewis, wife of Colin, Arthur’s son wrote to me about Arthur’s final days in a care home, *“I have been constantly trying to remind him to sing since he got here months ago. The power of music is amazing! Until today he has been belting out hymns... ok, not exactly belting... but all the tunes and words are still in there and out they come! And, of course he always reminds me when I am (frequently) incorrect”*. A lovely insight!

[Paul Trepte - Organist and Director of Music 1990 - 2019]

Virtual Choral Evensong - The Rodolfus Foundation

In these challenging times where social distancing is paramount, many clergy, cathedrals, churches, and groups of musicians have used technology to produce virtual services. These range from a simple recording of a hymn to complete services recorded by potentially hundreds of singers. Here is just one example.

[Editor] I strongly recommend you listen to it. There is a link at the end of the article.

In these disquieting times, it's natural to turn to things which have endured for centuries. The Choral Evensong of the Anglican Church is just such a thing. The liturgy has its origins in the Book of Common Prayer, and over the centuries it has acquired numerous music adornments, which mysteriously coalesce into a whole even though they were composed centuries apart.



The Rodolfus Foundation streamed a virtual choral Evensong on Tuesday, which cleaved firmly to the ancient form of the rite, and must have come as a soothing balm to all the many worshippers deprived of it during the lockdown. Some churches have been broadcasting services from cleric's front rooms, and some church choirs have risen to the challenge of recording performances remotely.

The virtual Evensong offered something similar, but on a different level of technical sophistication, music splendour – and celebrity firepower. The aim was to raise funds for the foundation itself, which runs residential singing courses and a youth choir, and the cathedral choirs' Emergency Fund, which aims to raise £1 million to help church choirs on the brink of collapse.

The service was topped and tailed by a charming electronic fantasy on birdsong, video-recorded among the bluebells and trees of an English wood. There were opening and closing organ voluntaries, both by Bach, 16th century choral settings of the liturgy from Thomas Tallis, William Smith and the great Spanish composer Victoria, and 19th and early 20th century settings by Elgar and George Dyson. The performances were stitched together from more than 260 video recordings sent in by singers young and old, from 20 countries, bolstered here and there by eight singers of the terrific young vocal ensemble Voces8. Obviously, we couldn't see all 260 singers, but thanks to the wizardry of digital video editing we could see up to 30 at any given moment, in a honeycomb of tiny images. It was particularly touching to see all these individuals in their bedrooms or at the kitchen table, singing their hearts out, while our ears registered something completely different: a very convincing simulacrum of a genuine choral sound (all hail to the sound and video editors Alexander James and Matthew Norriss).

In between the vocal numbers were two lessons, read by Stephen Fry and Simon Russell Beale, the latter seated outside next to a country parish church, so the sound of birdsong could be heard

mingled with Paul's Letter to the Corinthians. The Reverend Richard Coles, of Strictly Come Dancing fame, offered prayers as did three young women representing Islam, Christianity and Judaism.

Everyone rose magnificently to the occasion, though one or two Individuals stood out, above all Rebecca Leggett, who sang the Cantor's lines in William Smith's Responses with touching grace and beauty. The highlight of the most musical performances was Parry's grand coronation anthem I Was Glad, which had an unusual crystal clarity. In all it was grand, moving, and a touch eccentric in a very English way.

To donate to the charities and watch the Virtual Evensong, go to www.therodolfusfoundation.org.uk/virtual-evensong

[Ivan Hewett from The Daily Telegraph on 21st May 2020]

The Federation details

Once a Chorister Editorial contact

The Federation of Cathedral Old Choristers' Associations has now published several editions of the Once a Chorister Magazine in electronic format, and this is the fifth. In general, the feedback has been positive about the content, and individual copies can be downloaded and printed for those who prefer a physical medium. Reports from Associations are not always published in the Once a Chorister magazine, but if not they can now be found on the Federation website www.fcoca.org.uk. This not only reduces the size of the magazine significantly and so reduces printing costs, but also means that our website has more up to date material. This does rely on Associations submitting their reports and those of their organists and master of choristers to their Regional Representative or directly to secretary@fcoca.org.uk

Once a Chorister is a great vehicle for keeping people up to date with what happened at the Federation Festival, and some articles that potentially affect all choral foundations.

I hope that this edition is to your liking. Please continue to submit articles for publication in the Once a Chorister magazine or the website www.fcoca.org.uk

The global pandemic has affected all our lives, and rules affecting if, when and how singing is permitted have changed several times in only a few months. As we go to publication in early November, England is under stricter lockdown which may once again (temporarily) prevent some choirs singing. Some choirs that only recently started singing together are no longer able, hence affecting their status in some reports.

[Alastair Pollard - OAC Editor]

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Secretary@fcoca.org.uk

Membership@fcoca.org.uk

Treasurer@fcoca.org.uk

The Federation Prayer

Almighty God, we thank you for the music we enjoyed in our lives as choristers and sang together in your house to glorify your name. Let that music always be a witness to your majesty and love, and remind us that you are always watching, and listening from your heavenly throne. May your Spirit guide us through our daily lives so that we may continue to be the instruments of your peace, and proclaim with a glad voice your honour and glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Adapted from "The Musician's Prayer"

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Vice Chairman	Arnold Wills	(Peterborough)
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Belfast Cathedral Past Choristers' Association
Blackburn Cathedral Choirs Association
Bradford Cathedral Old Choristers' Association
Bristol Cathedral Choral Alumni
Cambridge, The Choir Association of **St John's College**
Cambridge, King's College Old Choristers' Association
Canterbury Cathedral Old Choristers' Association
Carlisle Cathedral Old Choristers' Association
Chapel Royal Choristers' Association
Chelmsford Cathedral Old Choristers' Association
Chester Cathedral Choristers' Association
Chichester Cathedral Choristers' Association
Christ Church Cathedral, New Zealand, Choir Society (Inc)
Dublin Christchurch Cathedral Past Choristers' Association
Dublin St Patrick's Cathedral Past Choristers' & Pupils' Association
Durham Cathedral Old Choristers' Association
Edinburgh St Marys Cathedral Old Choristers' Association
Society of Ely Choristers (Societas Choristarum Eliensium)
Eton College Old Choristers' Association
Exeter Cathedral Old Choristers' Association
Gloucester Cathedral Old Choristers' Association
Guildford Cathedral Choir Association
Hereford Cathedral Former Choristers
Kingston All Saints Parish Church Choir Association
Leicester Cathedral Old Choristers' Association
Lichfield Cathedral Former Choristers' Association
Lincoln Cathedral Old Choristers' Association
London (St. Paul's): The Guild Of The Companions Of St Paul
Newcastle Upon Tyne Cathedral Old Choristers' Association
New York Saint Thomas Choir School Alumni Association
Norwich Cathedral Ex Choristers' Guild
Oxford Christ Church Cathedral School Old Boys Association
Oxford New College Old Choristers' Association
Peterborough Cathedral Old Choristers' Association
Portsmouth Cathedral Old Choristers' Association
Rochester Cathedral Old Choristers' Association
St. Albans Cathedral Ex-Choristers' Association
St. Edmundsbury Cathedral Old Choristers' Association
Salisbury Cathedral School Association
Sheffield Cathedral Old Choristers' Association
Southwark Cathedral Old Choristers' Association
Southwell Minster Old Choristers' Association
Tenbury Wells St Michael's College Society
Tewkesbury Abbey Schola Cantorum
Truro Cathedral Old Choristers' Association
Wakefield Cathedral Old Choristers' Association
Warwick St Marys Guild Of Ex-Choristers
Wells Cathedral Choir Association
Westminster Abbey Old Choristers' Association
Westminster Cathedral Old Boys' Association
Winchester Cathedral Old Choristers' Association
Winchester College Quiristers Association
Worcester Cathedral Old Choristers' Association
York Minster Choristers' Association

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