

PETERBOROUGH CATHEDRAL OLD CHORISTERS' ASSOCIATION.



2014 NEWSLETTER.

EDITORIAL.

"...above the green and unburnt fen
The little houses of an English town,
Cross-timbered, thatched with fen reeds coarse and brown,
And high o'er these, three gables, great and fair,
That slender rods of columns do upbear
Over the minster doors, and imagery
Of kings....
Wrought in these gables".

These words from William Morris's "Earthly Paradise" (1871) may perhaps be fitting to describe the fabled West Front of Peterborough Cathedral. This superb facade, which is one of the glories of the Minster, is probably the first thing that springs to mind when old choristers think of the Cathedral. The most abiding memory, of course, is of the interior of the Romanesque building itself - so very spacious and uncluttered, with a minimum of ostentatious stained glass and few fussy monuments. The Minster contains so many outstanding features: the magnificent Nave ceiling, the beautiful Eastern Building, the elegant Victorian choir stalls and baldachino, the ancient eagle lectern, and the resting place of Queen Katherine of Aragon. The list is endless. Suffice it to say that we all love this superb house of God in which we were privileged to sing, and will assuredly cherish memories of our time in the choir until the end of our days. These are, in Wordsworth's eloquent verse, "precious thoughts/That shall not die and cannot be destroyed".

2014 REUNION.

This year's reunion took place on Saturday 28 September. Once again, it was held in conjunction with the annual gathering of the Friends of the Cathedral. Old choristers gathered in the stalls and rehearsed with the choirs under the genial direction of Steven Grahl. Before the service, MARK ROBERTSHAW laid a wreath at St. Sprite's Chapel in memory of old choristers and former pupils of The King's School who lost their lives in the two world wars. The first lesson at Evensong was read by LOUISE LAPRUN. After the service, tea was served in the Almoner's Hall. The Annual General Meeting then followed. The final event of the day was the reunion dinner, which was held at The Park Inn. Speakers were The Rt. Revd. Dr. Donald Allister, Lord Bishop of Peterborough, and old chorister Dr. SOPHIE ESER. A first-class meal was enjoyed by the assembled company. The reunion proved to be a very happy and delightfully nostalgic event.

2015 REUNION.

Next year's reunion will be held on Saturday 26 September. Please make a note of this date in your diary NOW and make every effort to be with us.

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER CECIL JOHN GEORGE WILLIS, RNR, 1932-2014.

The death of John Willis on 14 October robbed the Association of one of its most colourful characters, as well as one of its greatest supporters. He was 82 and had been suffering from cancer for some time.

John was born in Grays, Essex on 1 October 1932. He and his parents moved to Peterborough when John was four, and he attended Walton Primary School. He moved on to The King's School Junior School in 1940. He was a chorister from 1942-1946, singing under Dr Henry Coleman and later Dr Cooper Francis, and many were the tales he told of Dean Christopherson, Archdeacon Millard and Bishop Lang. John was at The King's School during the acting headship of W F F Shearcroft and later under Reg Hornsby. He left King's in 1946 and moved to St Vincent's Royal Naval School in Portsmouth, prior to following in his father's footsteps by joining The Royal Navy.

John saw active service in the Far East during the Korean War of 1950-1953, as well as in the Persian Gulf, and during the Malayan Emergency he served alongside the Gurkhas in both Malaysia and Borneo. As a young Petty Officer he met and courted Gillian Attwood; they were married at St Mark's Church, Peterborough in 1959. Soon afterwards, John was promoted to Acting Sub-Lieutenant and sent on an Officers' Training course at The Royal Naval College at Greenwich, coming out as a Lieutenant and almost immediately being sent away to sea. Married life in the Willis household consisted of John being absent for much of the time, with Gillian staying at home to look after their two daughters, Rosemary and Helen. During his naval career, John was an officer on board seven ships.

In 1982 John retired from the Navy at the age of fifty, and was immediately snapped up to command the Peterborough Sea Cadet Corps. Shortly afterwards he joined the committee of the Cathedral Old Choristers' Association, serving on this body for over thirty years. In addition, he was elected to the committee of the Old Petriburgians' Association and was Membership Secretary of that organisation for over two decades. He was enormously proud of his links with the Cathedral and The King's School.

John Willis was indeed "an officer and a gentleman". He was gloriously non-PC - and rejoiced in it. 'Head Teacher', 'Chair' of this or that, 'Humankind' and other equally inane expressions were not for him. He had a tremendous sense of humour and, right up until the end of his life, his conversation was littered with various amusing nautical expressions.

John died in the Sue Ryder home at Thorpe Hall. His private funeral service was held at the Peterborough Crematorium on 28 October. This was followed by a service of thanksgiving at Marholm Parish Church, at which the Association was represented by Andrew Torbell. The hymns included (inevitably) "Eternal Father, strong to save" and "Jerusalem". The eulogy was given by Trevor Elliott, Deputy Headmaster of The King's School and a close friend. John's ashes were later placed in Marholm churchyard, close to those of his parents.

With affection and kindly remembrance we bid him farewell. To Gillian and the members of his family we extend our sympathy in their great loss. Requiescat in pace.

CANON DONALD GRAY, 1924-2014.

Donald Gray, who died on 25 February, was a greatly-loved Vicar of Farnham, where he ministered for two decades. He was 89 and had been ill for more than three years.

Donald was born in Peterborough in 1924. His father was employed on the railway and Donald was one of five brothers (his younger brother, Dick, was also a chorister). He was educated at The King's School from 1935-1942. He joined the Royal Artillery in 1944 and was commissioned to serve in a rocket battery. He received an early release from the army as an ordination candidate, and went to King's College, London in 1946, completing his theological training at Lincoln.

He was ordained by Bishop Spencer Leeson in 1950 and was appointed as curate of Abington, Northampton. There he met Mary Coupe and they were married in 1953. That same year Donald moved to St Paul's Church, Bedford for his second curacy; he was also chaplain to Bedford General Hospital. In 1956 he became curate of St Paul's Knightsbridge, a church with a fine musical reputation. Donald's parishioners included HRH The Princess Margaret and Lord Halifax.

Donald's first incumbency was at North Holmwood, Surrey in 1959; four years later he was appointed as Rural Dean of Dorking. The following year he became Assistant Director of Ordinands for the Diocese of Guildford and also an ACCM selector. In 1967 he and Mary moved to Farnham, which was to be Donald's benefice for more than twenty years. He later became Rural Dean of Farnham and an honorary canon of Guildford Cathedral. The Grays retired to Alresford in 1989. Many of Donald's former parishioners travelled to Alresford for the service of thanksgiving which followed his cremation on 6 March. Requiescat in pace.

RICHARD MEIKLEJOHN, 1972-2014.

Richard Meiklejohn, who died at the beginning of this year aged forty-one, was a chorister from 1983-1986 and a very gifted musician. He left King's in 1992 and went to Exeter University to read Drama. While he was there he was diagnosed with Aplastic Anaemia, a rare blood disorder that affects bone marrow and the production of blood cells. He displayed great strength of character by managing to work full-time in London whilst undergoing regular medical treatment. He was placed on the international bone marrow register for a donor. It took almost twenty years from

diagnosis to finally finding a suitable donor and Richard underwent the transplant in the summer of 2103. He appeared to be making a good recovery, but while his immune system was low he contracted pneumonia and was admitted to the Critical Care Unit at Peterborough City Hospital just before Christmas. There he died very peacefully with his family by his side. Requiescat in pace.

Dr. STANLEY VANN MEMORIAL FUND.

The Dean and Chapter intend to refurbish the area surrounding the Nave altar in the Cathedral, and wish to install some suitable new furniture in that part of the building. A desk and chair is required for the use of the Director of Music, and it has been agreed that this will form a fitting memorial to the late Dr. Stanley Vann.

Due to the generosity of many of Stanley's former choristers, the appeal for funds for this scheme now stands at approximately four and a half thousand pounds. This means that we are currently short of just five hundred pounds, and it would be splendid if any of Dr. Vann's 'boys' who have not yet contributed to the Appeal could help us to reach our target. Once all the money has been raised, then the craftsman entrusted with this project can begin work. Alex Spires will be pleased to provide further information. His e-mail address is: a.spires409@btinternet.com

NEW DIRECTOR OF MUSIC.

Steven Grahl was formally welcomed as the new Director of Music at services in the Cathedral on Sunday 14 September. After Evensong, he gave a short organ recital at 5.00pm. He replaces Robert Quinney, who was Director of Music here for four terms before moving to Oxford as Director of the choir of New College and also becoming a Professor in the faculty of Music at the University.

Steven was brought up in Derby, where he sang in the Cathedral choir and was an organ scholar before going to study at Magdalene College, Oxford, and later at The Royal Academy of Music. He was successively Assistant Organist at New College, Oxford; Organist and Director of Music at St Marylebone Parish Church, London; and Principal Conductor of the Guildford Chamber Choir. We extend a warm welcome to him.

NEW MEMBERS.

We are very pleased to welcome the following new members of the Old Choristers' Association: EVAN BARKER, CAROLINE BARNES, ALEX BASTOW, ELIZABETH CUNNINGHAM, EDGAR HIBBINS, NICHOLAS LOWE, BEATRICE QUINNEY, JOSIAH ROBERTSON and JACOB SPIRES.

PERSONALIA.

The Revd. TOM BATES was made deacon in Llandaff Cathedral on Sunday 28 June. He is serving as an assistant curate in the parish of Merthyr Tydfil and Abercanaid.

Mary Blake, wife of old chorister GEOFF BLAKE, died in May this year at the age of ninety-nine. Our condolences are extended to Geoff, who has been a pillar of the Association for very many years.

SARAH COOPER was one of a number of young journalists who had the honour of being presented to Her Majesty The Queen at a champagne reception in the capital in May. Sarah was present to help celebrate the 150th anniversary of The Journalists' Charity in London.

ALEX CRAIG is currently on an acting course at the Italia Conti School. TOM CRAIG, his brother, recently qualified as a doctor and returned from a placement in New Zealand to a hospital in North London.

Former Assistant Organist BARRY FERGUSON was unable to attend this year's reunion as he was at Rochester Cathedral for the premiere of one of his works - a setting of the Thomas Hardy poem "Afterwards". It was performed by The King's Singers. Barry was Head Chorister at Exeter Cathedral, and later a pupil at Clifton College. He read music at Cambridge, where he was organ scholar at Peterhouse. In 1964 he moved to Peterborough as assistant to Stanley Vann. He was appointed as organist of Wimbourne Minster in 1971, and six years later became Organist and Master of the Choristers at Rochester Cathedral. Barry left Rochester in 1994 and since then has lived in Shaftesbury, where he has a busy life as a freelance composer and recitalist. He lectures on "Thomas Hardy and Music" for the University of Bristol.

ANDREW GOWER is Vice-Principal of East Kent College, Canterbury.

We extend our sincere congratulations to ROBERT GRIGGS and his wife Ashleigh, who had a son - Ethan Alistair - on 19 May.

RUSSELL HURCOMBE recently graduated from Keele University with a 2:1 Master's degree in Geoscience. He is now living in Derby and applying for geotechnical jobs in the Midlands area.

Old choristers RICHARD BATES, MATT HARDY, ROB MORTON, ALEX SPIRES, JACOB SPIRES and ANDREW TORBELL attended TIM HURST-BROWN'S 60th birthday luncheon at The Greetham Valley Hotel and Golf Club on Sunday 7 September. The afternoon included some music provided by the Yarwell and Nassington Britannia Brass Band. A very happy time was had by all.

We record with sadness the death in May 2013 of Dorothy Nicholson, wife of Canon PETER NICHOLSON. We extend our belated sympathy to Peter, a beloved former Precentor of the Cathedral. He lives in Uxbridge and has very fond memories of his time in Peterborough.

DAVID BUTT PHILIP, who hails from Wells in Somerset, was a chorister here under Christopher Gower. He studied at The Royal Northern College of Music, was a choral scholar at Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral and sang as a lay clerk at Manchester Cathedral. David studied as a baritone on the postgraduate course at The Royal Academy of Music; he later re-trained as a tenor. He has performed at Glyndebourne, Covent Garden and English National Opera, and has recently been singing the role of Rodolfo in "La Boheme" with ENO at the London Coliseum.

HANNAH SANDISON is taking a Masters in Performance course at The Royal College of Music. She sings with English Touring Opera.

JACOB SPIRES was Head Chorister for two years, which is a very rare achievement. Since leaving the choir in July, he has taken up the organ under the supervision of Louise Reid, and has already played during services at All Saints' Church, Peterborough, where he also sings Bass in the choir. In November he took his Grade 8 examinations in Piano and Singing.

PAUL WISKEN is Headmaster of Forches Cross School in Barnstable, Devon.

MISSING OLD CHORISTERS.

We do not have contact details for the members of the Association listed below. Please get in touch if you can help us to locate any of these former choristers.

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| Miles Allchurch | Anthony Bates | Andrew Bayley |
| Matthew Bird | Darren Boothby | Simon Cornwell |
| David Cousins | Fabio D'Andrea | Matthew Donald |
| Philip Dowson | Stephen Duncan | Steven Fraser-Burton |
| Andrew Gambrill | Andrew Guthrie | Kevin Hollands |
| Darren Humphries | Philip Johnston | Stephen Ledbury |
| Clive May | Cavan Maybery | Roger Millidge |
| Justin Mitchell | Mark Mooney | James Morgan |
| Robert Newlyn | Edward Pallett | Simon Pead |
| Stephen Price | Tony Randall | Gareth Rise |
| Stephen Robinson | Jonathan Saunders | Robert Silverton |
| Alistair Smith | Graeme Smith | Howard Smith |
| Nigel Stewart | Martin Townsend | Adrian Tupman |
| David Twell | Rhys Walsh | John Ward |
| Chris Wearmouth | David Welborn | Gavin Welsh |

Tim Hurst-Brown has once again collated all the material and written the newsletter. I am extremely grateful to him for continuing to take on this considerable task.

With all good wishes for Christmas and the New Year,

Simon Wilkinson
Hon. Secretary

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