



THE VOICE

The newsletter of the Guild of Ex-Choristers of the Collegiate Church of St Mary, Warwick



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Editorial

Nick Hodges

Last September I became Chairman of the Federation of Cathedral Old Choristers' Associations, to which the Guild is affiliated. I made a commitment at that time to speak with every one of our 50 or so members in my first year of Chairmanship. I started doing so in February and, to the end of April, I have had conversations with 20 former chorister associations, from our oldest and most revered cathedrals to Oxford and Cambridge colleges and from active associations to those just managing to hold things together.



What has come out of these meetings, all held on-line (Zoom is a wonderful tool), amongst other things, is the passion of those who are involved in the associations for the time that they were choristers and the need for the Federation to promote the importance of choristership and our wonderful choral tradition. It has given me the inspiration to develop a conversation around the phrase, **celebrating choristership**. The Federation is now working with the Cathedral Music Trust (CMT, formerly known as Friends of Cathedral Music) and through them, talking with their recently appointed Choral Ambassador, Alexander Armstrong, who holds very similar views and talks the same language.

There can be no greater affirmation of the importance of choirs than the three wonderful articles in this edition from two current choristers and the "retiring" organ scholar. Thank you all for your wonderful contribution.

Finally, you may have noticed that this edition has a slightly different look. After 17 years of editing **The Voice**, I thought it was time for a spruce-up. I hope that this longer edition, as was the last, marking Tony King's outstanding record of

service, is the sign of things to come in the future. More articles. More about what's happening now. More celebration of choristership here in Warwick.

Director of Music's Report

Oliver Hancock

The word 'unprecedented' has been somewhat overused in the last year or so, but I think it's fair to say that for choirs and church musicians in England (among many others, of course), 2020 and 2021-so-far have been the hardest time since Cromwell. At St Mary's, all choral activities ceased before Mothering Sunday 2020 when the Music Dept. was placed on furlough. September



brought a ray of hope, cruelly dashed in November, renewed in December, and dashed again from New Year's Day. Easter Day saw the first Eucharist at St Mary's of 2021, and Wednesday 21st April was the first time the church had heard any chorister voices since Christmas Day 2020.

However, out of adversity came opportunity. During Lockdown I, a number of adult singers from the St Mary's community came together (virtually) to create the 'Lockdown Choir', recording hymns and anthems separately from home, and these recordings were then stitched together (and occasionally gently massaged) by

Dave Clark, one of our 'back row' basses. If you haven't experienced the "delight" of recording from home, rest easy... Gone is the comfort of colleagues, a generous acoustic; there is nowhere to hide and it quickly becomes something of a character-building exercise. But we are fortunate to have such willing volunteers, helping to keep the music going during that time.

A great concern for almost all choral directors was the state of the choir after five-and-a-half months of no rehearsals and no singing (although we were able to continue chorister vocal coaching, albeit online). At St Mary's, though, the resumption of singing in September was a blessed relief, with the choristers making a really very



A service during the pandemic, socially distanced

good sound. Inevitably, time had taken its toll on some boys' voices, but overall we were in a good position. All credit is due to the choristers for the way they took the mitigation measures in their stride: singing with two metres between you and the next chorister can be a challenge, but they adapted very well. November brought Lockdown II, but online rehearsals provided a useful opportunity to work on theory, musicianship, and other fundamental elements of being a chorister. We were able to put together an online Advent Carol Service ('as live', but from a closed building, sadly) and – all things considered – a good set of Christmas services. Our usual round of Christmas activities – Victorian Evening on Market Square, Carols at the Castle, myriad carol singing evenings, singing at Warwick Hospital – did not take place, which was both a sadness and a relief.

St Mary's made the decision to close the building and cease all activities before Lockdown III was announced, so the choristers returned to Zoom for vocal coaching and rehearsals. With a little cajoling, more recordings from home were produced, allowing us once again to provide choral music for the online Sunday morning services, plus singing provided from a small pool

of cantors. I am very grateful to Tony King, Dave Clark, Greg Bannan, Liz Mottram, and Simon Stenner for their cantoring this year. Unreserved thanks, too, to our organists Mark Swinton and Lucy Morrell. Very sadly, Lucy's time in Warwick comes to an end this summer. We shall be very sorry indeed to lose her, but wish her every joy and success in her new role at Dulwich College, and hope she will be back to visit very often!

As I write, chorister rehearsals have restarted, and it has been truly wonderful to hear the choristers in St Mary's again. Three of the boys have translated to the 'back row' as Junior Men, but – hearteningly – we have welcomed a number of new choristers this term. St Mary's current position is that we won't be able to welcome back our adult singers until Step 3 of the government roadmap, and there remains (at time of writing) a question mark over when choral services might resume. But, little by little, the choral tradition for which St Mary's is so well regarded is coming back to life.

The return of the choirs will be a very real joy, and I hope-against-hope that the lifting of all social restrictions on 21st June will also mean that congregations will be allowed to sing again, that we might once again be united by music in our worship. As Isaac Watts wrote:

Come, let us join our cheerful songs
With angels round the throne;
Ten thousand thousand are their tongues,
But all their joys are one.

It will be wonderful to have the choirs back performing soon. For details of when normal services will resume, please refer to the St Mary's website. A calendar of proposed events can be found at the end of this newsletter



Farewell to our Organ Scholar

As the Director of Music noted in his report, Lucy Morrell completes her time as Organ Scholar, at the end of the summer term, a post part funded by the Guild that she has held for 2 years. We asked Lucy to provide some thoughts on her time in Warwick. Ed

I can't believe how quickly the last two years have gone. Despite the obvious trials of Covid-19, I have still had a fantastic couple of years working at St Mary's. Before the first lockdown hit and everything was running 'normally', I would help with the training of the probationers during the weekly rehearsals. We worked on aspects of



music theory as well as some singing and aural practise. It was a real pleasure to see the improvements made by the youngest members of the choir and play a part in their musical development. On Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays, I would share the playing duties with Mr Swinton for the services of Evensong, Eucharist and Matins. Fully sung choral services are something which I have greatly missed, it has been wonderful to see so many establishments restarting and I sincerely hope St Mary's will be able to follow suit before I leave in July. I have loved the variety of repertoire covered by the choir, chosen carefully by Mr Hancock. The mixture of full choir, upper voices and men's voices services meant we covered a huge range of pieces when the choir was in full swing. As well

as accompanying services, I have given a number of recitals as part of the Friday lunchtime recital series which has been great fun. I've also recorded a few during the various lockdowns so the series can carry on.

I have very fond memories of my first Christmas in Warwick (2019). Some especially enjoyable moments included joining in with the Carols from the Castle as well as accompanying the St Mary's Scholars at the Victorian Evening. Christmas Eve was particularly special. It began with playing for the crib service, this was then followed by accompanying a lovely Carol service at Mallory Court Hotel with Mr Swinton, the boy choristers, and gentlemen of the choir. Following this we went to Warwick hospital to sing carols around the wards. I conducted half the choir for a couple of carols in each place and it was really very humbling. The staff and patients were so grateful to have us there and it was an honour to be able to provide them with some music that evening. This is one experience I will never forget. Following singing at the hospital, I joined the back row for a delicious curry in Warwick before we went off to sing/play Midnight Mass! Christmas 2020 was rather different, but I was very grateful that we were able to have some sung services.

As well as my duties at St Mary's, my role has also including working at King's High School. Over the two years I have been working towards achieving Qualified Teacher Status. It has been my first experience of classroom teaching and I've loved it. As well as teaching, I've been involved with extra-curricular music including taking theory club and conducting Wind Band..! In September I will be taking up the role of Music Teacher at Dulwich College in London which I am really looking forward to. I will be accompanying the Chapel Choir and hope to pick up other freelance organ playing in my 'spare' time.

My time in Warwick has been so enjoyable due to the wonderful people I have had the pleasure of working with. I want to pay particular thanks to Oliver Hancock and Mark Swinton who have been so welcoming, encouraging and supportive to me during my time here. They have helped me develop both my organ playing and confidence in accompanying as well as just being fantastic colleagues and friends. The men on the back row have been equally welcoming and lovely and I will miss everyone at St Mary's enormously. I would

also like to thank the Guild of Ex-Choristers and the Friends of Cathedral Music for funding my scholarship and making all this possible. Writing this article has made me think of all the fond memories made over the last couple of years, too many to mention here, but experiences which I will treasure for the rest of my life.

Lucy Morrell

Choir During COVID

Though for much of the last 14 months there have been few opportunities for the our choirs to sing, the music team has worked hard to maintain the enthusiasm of the choristers. We asked 2 of them to tell us how it's been for them. The first contribution comes form 9 year old Anna Chester and the second from 11 year old Thomas Dodsworth. Ed

2019 was amazing. I joined St Mary's choir as a probationer in January, just over one year before the first lockdown. I was seven years old. I started to learn to sing and I made friends in the choir. We met every Monday and Wednesday in the Song School to rehearse and we sang for Evensong on Wednesdays and for some Sunday services. I love learning new pieces in the rehearsals and singing for a congregation at the services. We were recorded by the BBC on Easter Sunday and sang in Chester Cathedral and St Paul's Cathedral. At Christmas I enjoyed singing for the patients at Warwick Hospital.

2020 was very different. I missed the choir during the first lockdown and was very happy when we could come back to St Mary's. Our rehearsals moved to the Church Nave and it is lovely to hear the music fill the space, but we could not sing for as many services and we could not travel to other Churches. I was very relieved that we could sing on Christmas Day as that is a very special thing to do. The coronavirus meant we could not sing together as much as I would have liked but 2020 will still be a special year for me as I became a full Chorister.

2021 (so far!) The lockdown meant we had to rehearse on zoom. Zoom rehearsals are much better than no rehearsals, but I could only hear myself and Mr Hancock and I missed hearing everyone's voices and the sound we make together. It is very exciting to be back in Church now and I hope we will be able to sing for services again soon.

Anna Chester

I joined the choir of St. Mary's in 2018 as a Probationer. It was one of the most exciting times of my life, as I had really developed a love for choral singing from my school in Warwick and I wanted to join St Mary's because it's the best choir in the area.



Singing every week in rehearsals and services became a huge part of my life and I met new friends and developed a lot under the expert guidance of our Director of Music Mr Hancock.

When the lockdown began a lot changed and it meant that we couldn't sing in church for a while, which I really missed, apart from the Autumn term and Christmas, which was really great.

Mr Hancock has been rehearsing with us online and that has been a good way of practicing each week and we've had vocal training sessions with Miss Pardoe as well, which have been great.

In addition, Mr Hancock delivered some Anthems for us to record at home, which other members of the choir recorded also. I really enjoyed listening to the recordings as they were played during various services and broadcast through Facebook.

Singing and recording by myself and playing my piano and clarinet has been ok, but I have really missed making music with my friends, both at school and particularly at St Mary's.

I can't wait to get back into St Mary's again to hear the organ and to sing all the amazing music that we sing at St Mary's.

Thomas Dodsworth

Well done to all our choristers, young and old, who have continued to maintain their singing skills during this difficult time.

Peter Stubbs Remembered

by Tony King

It was with great sadness that we learnt of the death just before last Christmas of Peter Stubbs, who had been a stalwart of the bass line at St Mary's for some 30 years.

I first met Peter in 1984 when he sang with the choir on a tour of Belgium and Luxembourg under Paul Trepte, accompanying us on that visit in his favourite Land Rover Discovery with Joan, his wife. Peter was at



the time Chief Engineer, Transmission Engineering with Land Rover, having had a highly successful career in the motor industry after graduating in Mechanical Engineering from Manchester University. He took early retirement in 1991, but continued to work as a consultant and also part-time lecturer at Coventry University.

As well as being an engineer Peter was also a man of faith and lover of choral music. Member of several choirs over the years, he joined St Mary's choir as a cantoris bass. He loved travelling with the choir too, abroad and for summer school weeks in UK cathedrals. Unfortunately, ill-health forced him to retire from the choir in 2014, although he continued to attend Sunday morning services when he could. There have been some warm comments from choir and church friends – Peter was “A stalwart of St. Mary's Choir, always ready with a smile” and “The heavenly choir has gained a new member!” It was a measure of the esteem which the gentlemen of the choir held for him that a number were able to attend Peter's funeral in January.

Speaking personally I certainly remember and celebrate that warm smile, his musical contribution to our choir here and sharing stories of our respective years in industry. As the late Ray Sollett would have said: ‘He will be sorely missed’.

Roy Titcombe

We heard recently of the the death of Roy Titcombe who was a bass in the choir in the late 1960s and early 1970s. He joined at the same time that his son, Simon, joined as a chorister and both sang on a number of the choir's albums, including Schutz & Purcell, Messiah and Popular Hymns, all directed by Geoffrey Holroyde. May he rest in peace and rise in glory.

Voices from the Past

A former Head Chorister, Ian Rabjohns, recently made contact and applied for membership of the Guild. Ian was a senior chorister at the time I joined the choir in 1956. His brother, Jeremy, joined at the same time as me. I was delighted to hear from Ian and asked if he might like to provide an update on the last 60-odd years! Ed

It is a long time since my voice was aired as a chorister. I am not going to count and leave that to those who know!

On leaving Warwick to go to college in Loughborough, I rarely returned, finding myself increasingly drawn into the outdoor world through adventure activities and wildlife interests. I did keep a thread of musical attachment via playing clarinet and jazz. My teaching career began at an outdoor school in Shugborough Park, Staffordshire. I climbed (or paddled) my way up the rapids of white water competition; finishing up in the first division before marrying Jessica and moving off to teach in Northern Alberta, Canada.

Keg River was a remote community of mixed Cree Indian, Metis and immigrant European farmers. The farming activity very seasonal with snow on the ground for six months. At least it was then but not now I think.

Thinking back, we were whimps grumbling about the cold nave at winter Friday night practice. Try dealing with up to -- down to rather minus 60F. Only allowing the school buses to run down to minus 40, going out to look for them if they failed to turn up before the kids froze.



Great trips into the bush, the rifle mostly for protection not aggression. Plenty of brown and grizzly bears. It was all very different to those cosy camps in the Cotswolds, but those summer breaks are well remembered. Does anyone else remember a visit to Bibury Court after singing Sunday morning service and the aging matriarch

handing round sherry and Gauloise cigarette? I know Neil (Thurley) was there. I revisited a few years ago and it is now a hotel

I have fond memories of Len's (Harbour) loan of his house on Sunday nights, listening to radio Luxembourg and the underage sessions at the Punch Bowl. Also the two weeks sailing on the Broads with Guy Dean (a St Mary's curate).

I am now tucked away on the Welsh side of the lower Wye Valley, near Monmouth, a seven acre small holding with a few rare breed sheep and an ancient orchard. This has proved a life saver over the past year providing a huge resource for investigations into rare invertebrates, (a scientific journal publication pending) and a peaceful location for writing poetry. A large collection of classical and jazz cd's plus all my old vinyls helps to fill those long winter nights.

Hopefully now as we get more freedom I can see more of our two children and four granddaughters, who all play some sort of musical instrument. Whatever achievements come and go, music is for life.

Here is a poem I wrote during the second lockdown.

Life's Record

This is not a look at scientific progress,
more a bio-study of my auditory decline.
There is no sign hanging there to say where
this all began but memory stores it all.
The brain has it in that vast record can.

The 78, that breakable plate so long revered;
we stood there, take after take, the cold nave,
a few boys and the older men.
No rave this just the tired choir before
the Christmas boost, no glossy cover, 1954!
brown paper and our name, I was only ten.

It went from there to Ronnie Scott's
Beatles, jazz dives, learning clarinet
to emulate the hot licks of the time.
Monty Sunshine, Mozart too was there.
Those discs collected scratches, wrinkles
as the owner did, and all things changed—

--that value lost its place, the object lost its face
became degraded, small, then seemed to have
no place at all, lost in some cloud where
like an apple it got plucked, eaten, core
tossed back on high until the random
sequence called it for another try.

Now in age I've travelled round that ring
of tape, CD, and all the other things.
They've had their day, they've played their part.
I'm going round an old refrain; with Christmas
come.
Made a new case for my memories, cleaned
them up
and hear again that magic crackle start.

Ian Rabjohns

I thought this was a lovely article by Ian and I am very grateful to him for taking the time to write it. It is such a pleasure to hear what people have been up to when you've not been in touch with them for a long time. I hope this has inspired you to put "pen to paper" in the metaphorical sense, to tell your story, or part of it. Do please send me your contributions. Ed

Chairman's Column

Will Butcher

As Spring has now sprung and many jobs have been received, there appears to be some hope for a better year in the air! I think this edition of The Voice reflects this and is a credit to our editor and for all those who have provided some great content, particularly our current choristers on their experiences during lockdown. However, it is always sad to hear of the passing of our singing colleagues and on a personal note I also have fond memories of Peter Stubbs from my time as a chorister in the front and back row.

The face to face **reunion** for our past and present choristers on **Saturday 18th September** is something I am looking forward to, celebrating the **30th Anniversary of the Girls' Choir** (postponed from last year) as well as a great chance to enjoy a post lockdown gathering! The event includes evensong and a dinner, with a guest appearance from **Simon Lole**, the founder and Director of Music of the Girls' Choir. The event has been posted on Facebook, where I would encourage everyone to register their interest to assist our planning for numbers. For those not on Facebook please drop us a line via the email address at the end of the newsletter.

For those who live too far away or have prior engagements, there is a second chance to catch up via the virtual St Mary's Ex-Choristers' Guild AGM to be held at **7:30pm Wednesday 15th September 2021**. More details of both events will be shared near the time, so get these dates in your diary so you don't miss out!

Diary (proposed)

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| Saturday 26 June 7.30 pm | St Mary's Choir Summer Concert with Beauchamp Sinfonietta |
| Sunday 5 September | Patronal Festival |
| Saturday 18 September | 30 th Anniversary of St Mary's Girls' Choir |
| Sunday 31 October 10.30 am & 5.30 pm | Choral Matins for All Saints Choral Eucharist for All Souls |
| Sunday 28 November 5.30 pm | Advent Carol Service |
| Saturday 18 December | Carols at the Castle |
| Sunday 19 December 6.30 pm | 1 st Carol Service |
| Wednesday 22 December 5.30 pm | Britten, Ceremony of Carols sung by combined choristers |
| Thursday 23 December 6.30 pm | 2 nd Carol Service |

FCOCA News

The Federation of Cathedral Old Choristers' Associations, 2021 Annual Festival and AGM were to have been held in Ely in October.

Because of the uncertainties caused by COVID-19, the Festival is being deferred to 2022. It is now expected to be held in September next year but the dates have not yet been confirmed.

The FCOCA 2021 AGM will now be held on-line, again with the date to be confirmed.

Saturday 18th September

REUNION

St Mary's Choristers, Past & Present

Celebrate 30th Anniversary of

St Mary's Girls' Choir

Guest Speaker

Simon Lole

Founder, St Mary's Girls' Choir

Event includes
Choral Evensong & Dinner

Your Guild Needs Your Support

The Guild of Ex-Choristers was formed to encourage former chorister of St Mary's to stay in touch, not only with the church and the current choir but also with their former contemporaries.

It also exists to provide support to the current choir and the music team who maintain the wonderful choral tradition at St Mary's. It does so through supporting the educational aspect of choir membership and the provision of an organ scholarship.

You may not be able to attend the annual reunion because of family commitments or your geographical location but, if you find yourself in Warwick, do pay a visit to the church and make yourself known as a former chorister to whoever is on duty.

You can also support financially through the RSCM Medal scheme or the Organ Scholarship Scheme. Or you could just **join the Guild**, if you have not already done so, and pay your annual subscription, which entitles you to vote at the AGM.

Do let us know what you would like to see your Guild doing. We appreciate feedback. Above all, engage with your Guild and **celebrate your choristership**. You can email us at the address below if you need further information.



The Guild of Ex-Choristers

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