

The Voice

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

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The Tony King Edition

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Outstanding

It is not just that Tony King celebrated the 60th anniversary of his joining St Mary's choir in November this year but that he did so with unbroken membership of the choir. That is a remarkable achievement, probably unrivalled in the choral music world. Whilst at university in London and Oxford, he returned to the choir during vacations and was always available for recordings and broadcasts. On returning to Warwick to live and work, in addition to his commitment to the choir, Tony also became involved in many other activities of the church. In fact, there's probably no part of the church's life that he has not influenced.



Tony King speaking after the presentation made at the service in early November in recognition of his 60 years service to the choir and church

Tony is a multi-talented musician, as others in this issue testify. Not only an exceptional singer, he's an accomplished keyboard player, a more than competent conductor and a talented composer. Amongst his output is a mass written for the choir, anthems, including O Saviour of the World and Go Christall Tears, the carol, Balulalow and various arrangements of popular songs including The Way We Were.

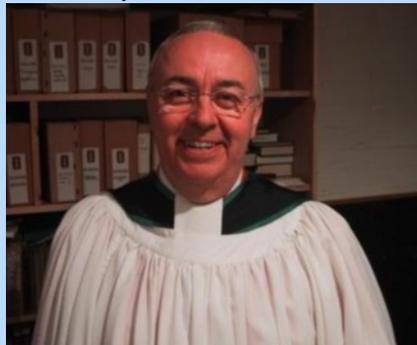
Tony and wife, Val have done so much for St Mary's, touched so many lives and brought so much joy that they are the very core of what is St Mary's. We thank them both for their service and hope that it will continue for very many more years.

A tribute

from Andrew Brough - former St Mary's chorister and member of The New Group

Born and bred in Warwick, Anthony originally joined the choir at St Nicholas before being persuaded to move up the road to St Mary's where he rapidly progressed to being the leading boy on Decani. He had a fine treble voice although, sadly, no recordings of that time have survived – amateur recording onto tape, for example, was still in its infancy in the early 60's.

A highly intelligent boy, he was blessed with an excellent ear, natural musical empathy and a desire to perform to the highest standards, making him an invaluable member of the Choir. It was no surprise that he was awarded a place at Warwick School and had choral scholarships existed at St Mary's in those days, he would certainly have merited one.



After his voice changed, he accepted an invitation from the DOM, Geoffrey Holroyde, to move into the back row as a first-bass, helping to establish what became a firm St Mary's tradition of growing our own men's choir. His outstanding sight-reading ability, combined with a confidence to lead his voice-part, helped Geoffrey to expand the repertoire and encourage some of the "elder statesmen" to tackle pieces they would otherwise have felt beyond them. Throughout his time at university in London he continued to sing at St Mary's and, when studying for a PGCE at Oxford, met Andrew Fletcher who would become Geoffrey's successor as DOM.

A shortage of tenors in Andrew's time reached crisis point and he persuaded Tony to come to the rescue – a decision that proved to be inspired. His wonderful tenor voice can be heard on many recordings, radio broadcasts and as a member of The New Group (our own close-harmony ensemble, for whom Tony also wrote a number of arrangements). In the 1980's he moved back to singing bass, thus avoiding service as an alto, although I have no doubt that he could have fulfilled that role as well, had there been the necessity!

Apart from his musical contribution to St Mary's, he gave great service as treasurer to both the Choir and its Friends and has always been a willing contributor to some of the "fringe" aspects of Choir life such as helping to organise tours, choir-camp, fund-raising or the annual Choirmen's Dinner. He has also had a major impact on the social development of the Men's Choir; he is outstandingly quick-witted and able

to see the funny side of any situation. His ability to remember and recount "saucy" jokes is legendary and in Tony's company laughter is never very far away.

Together with his wife Val, Anthony has played a huge part in the life of St Mary's Choir and his outstanding 60 years of service will long be remembered. We should all be grateful that he has chosen to use his outstanding talents almost exclusively to the benefit of our choir and his great loyalty and friendship is to be both acknowledged and highly appreciated. Thank you, Tony – long may your membership of this wonderful organisation continue!

Never one to hold back

Some memories from Dr Tim Peters
A former bass and assistant organist

My first memory of Tony was in 1977 when, still at school, I joined the back row as a bass. While the standard of sight-reading of the whole choir was much better than I'd experienced at that time it was the arrival of Mr King to tackle, for the first time, the Lennox Berkeley Mass that blew me away. The gentlemen had been working on it for a few weeks when Tony had been away. He arrived, sight-read the whole work faultlessly and, seemingly, effortlessly. I remember thinking; 'this shouldn't be happening, fiendish rhythm AND awkward pitch, how can this be??...'

Tony was always fiercely defensive of the choir. In 1979 we spent a week in Paris recording Purcell and Charpentier for CBS. One of the soloists was a rather hoity-toity tenor called James Griffett. At one point some rather tired boys got a bit

lost in the score, an impatient Mr Griffett leaned back and ticked them off. Well, Tony bided his time..... until Mr Griffett had to look over his fellow soloist's shoulder to find out where we'd got to - in a flash Tony pounced, shouting from the back of the choir; ' Oh, do try and keep up Mr Griffett!! we're on page 40, bar 17.....'

A few years later I was accompanying rather than singing and the choir spent a memorable week at Canterbury Cathedral under Simon Lole. Tony couldn't make the weekday evensongs and arrived for the weekend services - it was necessary that everyone realised that the big beast was back in town. The moment came in Handel's Hallelujah chorus; I didn't really hear the tenor entry 'and He shall reign' from the console on the screen ...I felt it - somewhat thermo-nuclear in character. How could a whole week's music be reduced to memory of a single note?? Well, Tony made that the case.

60 Not Out

The autumn term was always one of anticipation. Starting back to choir in September after the summer break, with the prospect of darkening evenings, Warwick Mop, the Regimental Service with its pomp and ceremony, bonfire night and, of course, Christmas, were all part of belonging to St Mary's. In 1960, Tony and I were both 11 years of age. I lived in Victoria Street and had joined the choir in 1956. Tony lived in Hanworth Road and, with Michael Cheshire (who is standing behind Tony in the photograph) who lived on the Saltisford, would often walk home together after choir practice, especially on a Friday. During the time the Mop was in town, it was usually via the Market Square and quite often required a visit to the Saltisford Fish & Chip shop for a portion of chips (or, if not flush with pocket money, a bag of scratchings and, if we were flush, a bottle of dandelion and burdock).



Tony was always a first rate singer but I don't think I really appreciated that until after he had returned from university. We both progressed to the back row under Geoffrey Holroyde, Tony to sing bass and me, tenor and we both sang with Arthur Hilyer's, Warwick Singers. I took a break from the choir in 1972 but we continued singing together in the New Group, which had been formed by John Liggins. It was in these other singing groups that Tony's real skills came on show. Into his early 20s, he had developed a silky smooth, baritone voice of the most exceptional quality, which was accompanied by the most unnerving ability to sight-read virtually anything that was put in front of him.

In addition to his amazing musical ability, Tony is blessed with an equally amazing sense of humour. His acerbic wit and razor sharp repartee have reduced the back row to paroxysms of laughter on many occasions, much to the consternation of many Directors of Music. Tony can find humour in the most unexpected situations, which has been one of the binding factors of the close-knit gentlemen's choir and has helped many of us through difficult times.

I consider it a privilege to count Tony amongst my closest friends and to have had the pleasure of singing with him for so many years. - Ed.

A legend of the back row

A tribute from Katherine Dienes-Williams Organist and Master of the Choristers, Guildford Cathedral

Renowned for his dry, acerbic commentary, his times on choir tours (notably Russia, I was told), but above all, for me, a wise, steady and clear keeper of both the bass line and the purse.

Tony's excellent accounting was something I valued enormously – he had a complete understanding of how to present things clearly (as well as accurately!) and this was what guided the work and activity of the choir.



He was (and is!) loyal, dedicated, interested and ever present, rarely ever away with his beloved Val, but one could always enjoy tales of his travels and food recommendations.

That Tony has notched up such a fantastic innings is nothing short of incredible, and I am full of admiration for this remarkable dedication and achievement. Tony – warmest best wishes to you and thank you, from us all.

Diary

As a result of COVID it is not possible to provide any certainty of events over the coming months. As you will appreciate, it is all very fluid. To keep up to date with what's happening, please go to the St Mary's website at www.stmaryschurchwarwick.org.uk or visit the St Mary's Community Facebook page.

Many of the services at St Mary's are streamed live on Facebook and available on YouTube.

DoM's Column

The word 'unprecedented' has never been uttered so frequently, and it has been a rather different year for liturgy lovers, with so many of the major feasts and fasts being marked only in our homes - it's positively Tudor - and choral singing vastly reduced, even removed. However, whether it's singing two metres away from one another (which I think may have positive results, chorally...) or online rehearsals where you can see the singers' lips moving (all at different times - hopefully not a 'new normal') but not hear a note/only hear yourself, our choirs have taken it in their stride and remained paragons of stoicism and fortitude.

Christmas *is* coming. In quite what form we don't yet know, but if we should keep anything in our hearts over the next few weeks it is hope. And we shall soon again renew our song.

All the very best,

Oliver Hancock, Director of Music



FCOCA News

Both of the 2020 Federation of Cathedral Old Choristers' Associations events were cancelled as a result of the COVID pandemic. The AGM should have been held at Rochester in May and the Annual Festival at Chester in September. The AGM was eventually held on-line, using Zoom video conferencing, on the weekend when the Festival should have taken place. 22 delegates attended representing 20 associations, slighter better than the physical AGMs held in recent years.

The principal business of the meeting was to elect the Executive Committee and the officers of the Federation. Guild Vice President, Nick Hodges, was elected Chairman for a term of 5 years. In his statement to the meeting the new Chairman said the Federation and many of its members faced some significant challenges, none more so than falling membership in Associations and some closing as a result. He said that there was a lot to do but that he was confident that it could be turned around and that the Federation would survive in the long term.

The 2020 edition of the Federation annual magazine, *Once a Chorister*, has been published on-line and includes a longer statement from the Chairman about the challenges ahead and ways in which they may be addressed. Also there is an interview with our own Director of Music, Oliver Hancock and his wife, Rachel Mahon, Director of Music at Coventry Cathedral. The link to the magazine can be found at www.fcoca.org.uk.



Chairman's Column

With this edition of the Voice dedicated to Tony King's 60 years at St Mary's, it is amazing to think that most of our former choristers will have had the pleasure of singing with him during this period. In a similar vein, many also will have sung with Martin Carpenter who after over 30 years at St Mary's has moved to Coventry Cathedral as a choral clerk. Congratulations and a big thank you to you both for your services over the years.



Reflecting on these achievements as well as the 30th anniversary of the Girl's choir, 2020 should have been a great year for celebrations. Let's look forward to a more

positive 2021 and, fingers crossed, to being able to celebrate these great milestones together in food, drink and song.

We had our first ever virtual Guild AGM in September which was successfully attended by former choristers via Zoom. Although we were not able to meet face to face or sing, the virtual format meant that we had an international flavour with attendees from the French Alps and Canada! Off the back of this, we are looking at trialling a virtual social event. Feel free to drop us a line at our email below if you are interested in attending.

As we finally say goodbye to this year, I wish you all a safe and healthy Christmas and a prosperous 2021.



The Guild of Ex-Choristers

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