

ECOCA Newsletter

February 2020



Contents



Editor's Letter
Gordon Retires
25th Anniversary of Girl Choristers
ECOCA Reunion
Association News
Choir News
Choristers at Christmas 2019
Seymour's stories: memories of the late Bob Norman

Dear Members,

Welcome to the ECOCA Newsletter February 2020. It has been another significant year in the life of the Association, with the 25th anniversary of the first Girl Chorister Evensong at Exeter Cathedral, and the celebration of this important anniversary on Sunday 17th November 2019.

I am hoping to use Mailchimp to send more regular electronic newsletters in the future, including Gordon Pike's account of our annual reunion nearer the event.

As always, I would be very happy to receive any news or contributions for future editions. Please feel free to contact me at anytime with your news or ideas:

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Gordon Retires on Easter Monday 13th April 2020



Our reunion this year will mark the end of an era for Exeter Cathedral and our Association. Gordon Pike has decided that Easter Monday will mark his final services after over 50 years as a treble, tenor and punctator.

Gordon joined the choir as a probationer in 1963. His knowledge of the Boy and Girl Choristers over the last six decades is incomparable.

Superlatives are often overused, but entirely unnecessary in describing Gordon's contribution to the life of the Cathedral and our Association. Almost all of our members will have sung with Gordon, or have been taught by him. You are advised to arrive early this Easter Monday!



25th Anniversary of Girl Choristers.



Exeter Cathedral Girls' Choir celebrated its 25th birthday on 17th November 2019 by performing two new choral works specially commissioned for the anniversary.

The new versions of the *Magnificat* and *Nunc Dimittis* were by the renowned American composer Nico Muhly.

The day of celebration began with Choral Eucharist in the nave, sung by the current Girl Choristers and adults. This was followed by a recital in the nave sung by former Girl Choristers, current Girl Choristers, Lay Vicars and Choral Scholars.



The anniversary Evensong featured the premiere performance of *The Exeter Service* by Nico Muhly, with the composer present.

The service was attended by Stephen Tanner, the first conductor of the Girl Choristers, under whose guidance developed into the fully-fledged section of the choral foundation, taking their rightful share in major services, broadcasts, tours and concerts.

Evensong was also attended by former Girl Choristers, Canon Ken Parry and Canon Arthur Mawson (Precentor and Treasurer at the time of the establishment of the Girl Choristers) the Bishop of Exeter, members of the Music Foundation, and members of the ECOCA committee.



Nico Muhly was in Exeter Cathedral to hear his new works for the first time as he sat in on the rehearsal for a BBC Radio 3 Evensong recording, transmitted on 18th December 2019.

He said: "I'm so excited, the first time you hear a piece of yours, no matter how big or small, it's still totally thrilling and I'm very glad I haven't lost that connection to the first time."



The Reverend James Mustard, Canon Precentor of Exeter Cathedral, who oversees the choirs, said he had been wanting to work with Nico Muhly for some time and was "ecstatic" about the new pieces.

"I am overjoyed, it has been a real dream for me to commission a composer of such stature to write for Exeter Cathedral," he said.

"The canticles are collectively called The Exeter Service, something many cathedrals have, but we've never had that before."

Memories of the 25th Anniversary of Girl Choristers. Charlotte Smith (2004-2008) and Molly Parham-Connolly (2003-2008)



November 17th 2019 saw the celebration of the 25th anniversary of Girl Choristers singing in the Cathedral. In 1994 Stephen Tanner founded the second Girls' Cathedral Choir in England.

The day provided an opportunity to remember fondly our time spent in the choir, catching up with old friends and sharing happy memories.

After Eucharist, Old Choristers were given a tour of the new song school and the newly refurbished Kalendar Hall.

Leigh in the kitchens cooked a delicious roast lunch prior to the recital in the Nave in which current and former Girl Choristers were joined by the back row to sing a few favourite anthems, including *I Was Glad* and *Zadok The Priest*.

The commemorative Evensong featured a new commission to acknowledge the anniversary: a set of evening canticles named '*The Exeter Service*', commissioned from Nico Muhly.

Following the service, a drinks and cake reception followed including further reminiscing. ECOCA kindly gifted the Cathedral Choir's current CD and pin to all Old Choristers who attended the day.

It was a lovely day enjoyed by all – we look forward to the next 25 years!

ECOCA Reunion 2019

Gordon Pike, Hon Treasurer



This year Easter Monday was so late that it fell on my birthday, 22nd April, and the next day most children were back at school for the summer term, with the Year 8's approaching Common Entrance.

I am very glad to report that the new Precentor Canon James Mustard has settled in very well but has found himself very busy with all aspects of Cathedral life. The Dean Jonathan Greener and his wife Pamela are making a very good impression, and



the new Chancellor Canon Chris Palmer and his wife Olivia, and the new Treasurer Canon Mike Williams and his wife Gillian, make up what I used to know as the Dean and Chapter. Canon Ian Morter and Canon David Gunn Johnson seem to be assisting the main Chapter, and then there is the Greater Chapter.

On our Easter Monday reunion forty-eight Old Choristers had gathered by 10.30am for a rehearsal with Timothy Noon, our Director of Music, and all present-day Choristers. The Mass setting was the *Messe a deux choeurs* Op.36 by Charles-Marie Widor (1844 – 1937) and communion motet *Ave Verum* by William Byrd. The Epistle was read by Dominic Asater and the Intercessions were led by our Chairman Rev. Charles Roberts.

Charles reminded us that we had lost an active member of our committee, Timothy Hampshire, during the last year. He was missed by quite a few of us over the course of the day.



As always, lunch at the school was a splendid affair, where the young Old Choristers had lunch with the present-day Choristers, while the Headmaster entertained the older Old Choristers in the library to a drink before they sat down to a lunch of quiche plus vegetables or salad, and a desert of meringue nest with strawberries and cream. We enjoyed it so much that we were nearly late for the 2pm rehearsal before Evensong.

When I arrived through the Golden Gates into the Quire the first thing to happen was a splendid rendition of Happy Birthday by everyone present to mark my 66th Birthday. At that moment I realised that we were all experiencing a wonderful day at Exeter



Cathedral for the Association because everyone was so welcoming and wanted the day to be a total success.

The Dean welcomed us all at the beginning of the service and even mentioned my birthday for which I publicly thanked him before we carried on singing. The music for Evensong was *Walmsley* in D Minor and *Like as the hart desireth the waterbrooks* by Herbert Howells. I have to say the anthem was sung with such sensitivity it was a very moving experience. As birthday boy of the Old Choristers I was given the first lesson to read, and Laura Kerr one of our teenage Old Choristers read the second lesson. I thought we both did a pretty good job. It was commented on later that I did not really need a microphone to make myself heard.

At the end of Evensong we retired to the Chapter House where a select band of Old Choristers, led by Simon and Andrew Swan, Jonny Titchin with my sister Shirley Vallance and my wife Penny, helped by Mary and Peter from the Cathedral, provided a cream tea and some fancy cakes. There was nearly an hour before the AGM meeting and this was spent talking to people who had all been at Evensong.



It was great to talk to Maureen Norman, the wife of Bob Norman, a previous Chairman of the Association. She drove down from Reading. Angela Knowles, the wife of Peter Knowles, had driven down from the depths of Somerset, and tapped me on the shoulder to say how much she had enjoyed Evensong and being able to come into tea. I noticed that Nicholas Pedlar, one of our Vice Presidents, was sat beside my wife and sister, having a good chat and enjoying his cup of tea and cream scone. I realised that the comradeship of new and old Old Choristers in the Cathedral community is remaining very strong, and this seems to bring the Cathedral alive. Long may it continue.

Once we had all moved to the Pearson Room for the AGM, with me carrying my blue overnight suitcase, and Mr Titchin and Mr Asater with their laptops, the meeting followed the agenda and this year I had copies of my audited accounts for all to see, and it did not take very long to have them approved by all present at the AGM. The officers of the committee were re-elected and then the rest were voted on in one go. It was at this point that the Chairman asked if there was anyone present at the meeting who would like to join the committee, especially female Old Choristers, to share the load with our one female member of the committee Cresida Peers. It was brilliant when Charlotte Smith and Hannah Deasy warmed to the idea of being on the committee, and it did not take long for members of the AGM to vote them on! All present were in favour, and I personally think they will be a great asset to the work that the committee gets involved in.

This year we were returning to the Mecure Southgate Hotel in Southernhay because it is so close to the Cathedral, and does not involve any travelling. I have to say when I walked into the room where they had laid eighty-eight places for the dinner, the room looked magnificent, and the tables had been prepared so carefully. The numbers for the meal were up by twenty people, and I think this was mainly due to our guest speaker Mr Lloyd Griffith, who had been an Alto Choral Scholar on Cantoris from 2003 to 2006, and had been on tour with us in America and to Norway. The committee had worked through quite a long list of potential guest speakers for this reunion with little success. Clive Dickinson, a former Cathedral Alto Choral Scholar, suggested that Lloyd would be a very good speaker.



I took the bull by the horns and contacted Lloyd to see if he would be our guest speaker. It was not an easy decision because he was in Belfast on the Saturday night doing a late night show but he got his agent to work out how he could arrive in Exeter by lunch time on Easter Monday. It took a couple of weeks to get the reply that he was able to get here in time and he would be the guest speaker.



Well the rest of his story for Easter Monday was absolutely brilliant. He came, sang Evensong, socialised with all who knew him and with those who did not know him. At the end of his speech he received a standing ovation of applause from everybody in the room. I was so pleased that this had happened on my birthday. I would never forget this night. It was the icing on the cake.

It was also great to invite the Canon Chancellor Chris Palmer and his wife Olivia to the dinner as our guests. As they left they thanked me or a wonderful evening. The raffle went very well, sold by our new committee members Charlotte Smith and Hannah Deasy, and made £374.00.



The first prize of six crystal cut tumblers donated by Nicholas Pedlar, was won by Miss Vicky Cannell, partner of Old Chorister Graham Morison. She thoroughly deserved to win a prize because she was the lady who sold the raffle tickets last year. The second prize was given by Lloyd Griffith, which was two tickets to the Sky Soccer AM studio in London, for a Saturday morning to watch how he present his show. The prize was won by Mr. Paul Morgan, Organist Emeritus of Exeter Cathedral. We all had a good laugh, including Paul, because he is not really much of a sportsman, however his wife Heather is, and no doubt they will go along together and have a wonderful time watching Lloyd.

There were quite a few raffle prizes to be given out, and I was lucky enough to win the last one myself, a large Easter Egg. To finish off the proceedings, the ladies on the top table received bouquets of flowers and the gentlemen had lucky dip miniatures of alcohol to take home. It gave me great pleasure to present to my independent examiner of the ECOCA accounts Carol Dobson a large bouquet of flowers for all the work she has done for me over the last ten years. It has been much appreciated.

This reunion seemed to run very smoothly and created quite a buzz around the Cathedral and at the hotel during dinner. It is a wonderful way to finish off the festivities of Easter, and long may it continue. I wish to have the last word by saying a big 'thank you' to all the people involved in the running of the Cathedral, whether it be priests, musicians, vergers, servers, staff at Exeter Cathedral School, floor managers, and staff in the offices, and many volunteers. It is so vital that everyone must work together so that we can all be proud of Exeter Cathedral and all that it stands for.

Association News



Lucian Nethsingha contacted Gordon Pike to report that on Friday 10th May 2019 Andrew Nethsingha was conducting a big concert at the Royal Festival Hall with the City of Birmingham Choir, the London Philharmonic Choir and soloists, and the Philharmonia Orchestra.

When Andrew arrived for the afternoon rehearsal he discovered that the Leader of the Philharmonia was a former Chorister of Exeter Cathedral. Lucian found this amazing! It was Benjamin Marquise Gilmore.



After the concert Lucian had a long chat with him and reported that he has turned out as a very nice young man! He was only with Exeter for two years because he was keen to move on to the Menuhin School, and then spent many years studying in Vienna. He joined the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, and he is now with the Philharmonia, which he joined less than a year ago, and is one of their two leaders. A considerable achievement for someone just over 30 years of age.



Lucian thought it remarkable to find two former Choristers of Exeter playing leading roles at the same concert at the Royal Festival Hall. They were both pupils of the Exeter Cathedral School, and taught by Mr Pike!

Association News



Paul Evans got in touch with Michael Beacham on 22/05/2019 after reminiscing about him on Easter Monday. Paul reported that Michael still lives in Guernsey. He and his wife have been struggling with their health as they approach their 90th birthdays.

Paul informed Michael that he was missed on Easter Monday, and Michael was very pleased to have received Paul's inquiry. Michael said that who knows what the next year will bring, and if possible, he might try to make it to Easter Monday.

Choir News

At Evensong on 8th September 2019, Heather Easting (Organ Scholar) was installed. Heather joins Exeter from Croydon Minster and Whitgift School, London. She hails from Wellington, New Zealand; and was welcomed with her husband, William.



Exeter Cathedral also welcome Tom Noon, Alice Risdon and Jessie Woodhouse, who were installed as Choral Scholars. Tom returns to Exeter having completed his degree in History at King's College, London.

Alice (the granddaughter of David Risdon, formerly Education Officer at the Cathedral) is pursuing an MA in English Literary Studies at the University of Exeter. Jessie is also at the University of Exeter, where she is studying for an MA in Theology.



During the service the Year 8 Choristers were invested as Senior Choristers.

After the service, Canon James Mustard congratulated Paul Morgan (Organist Emeritus) on the 50th anniversary of his appointment to Exeter.



Choristers at Christmas 2019



After a few days off after the end of term, Choristers returned to School and the Cathedral on 22nd December to begin 'Choir Term'. With rehearsals every day, trips to the cinema, lunches at School, many services, and festive fun in the Boarding House in the evenings, it was a very busy time for the Choristers (and for Mr Baurance and Mr Fitzpatrick!).

On Sunday the 22nd they sang a Eucharist in the morning, Evensong in the afternoon, and then rehearsed for the Christmas Eve service. The next day saw them going on a trip to see Star Wars at the cinema, rehearsing again, and then a Carol Service in the evening.

The Crib Service took place at noon on Christmas Eve, after which the Choristers rehearsed for the Service of Lessons and Carols ('the Grandisson'). The Grandisson, the big-ticket service here at Exeter, took place that evening in a packed Cathedral.

The next day the boarding Choristers learned that Father Christmas had visited the Boarding House and, after opening their stockings, they went (as is traditional) to wake up the Dean, the Director of Music, and the Headmaster with carols under their windows (they were showered with chocolates and candy canes as their traditional reward!).

They sang Eucharist in the morning, followed by Mattins, and then enjoyed some drinks and canapés in the Chapter House. After bidding farewell to the Fitzpatricks, Choristers and their families enjoyed Christmas lunch together in the School before returning to the Cathedral for Evensong with carols from the Minstrels' Gallery.



Seymour's Stories:

Memories of Bob Norman



At the end of the summer holiday I found myself looking forward to returning to Exeter both for lessons and my Cathedral duties. Strangely enough the Director of Music, Dr Alfred Wilcock, known to all as 'Baldy', stopped me unexpectedly



as I was on the way to the Cathedral and said: "*I intend to use your lovely voice more often for solos so be prepared whenever there is an opportunity.*" I was not sure whether to be flattered or scared.

Unfortunately, we were not able to celebrate Guy Fawkes day completely as we do today since fireworks could not be purchased. However, we did make the best of it by building an enormous bonfire in the school playground, which had a hard mud surface. We were fortunate to have a brewery distribution point next door to us, and the workmen threw any damaged or broken wooden bottle containers down to us and we were only too pleased to add these to the pile. Other bits of wood and shavings in sacks were collected from the Cathedral workshop which was located immediately opposite the front door of the Chantry. Once this annual event was over the pace of work increased seemingly tenfold as we were heading for Advent and Christmas.

We had a very pleasurable event to look forward to – the annual visit to the Theatre Royal for the pantomime. As far as I remember this was usually on Boxing Day and make up for the fact that we had to stay on for week at school after Christmas singing the services. The Succentor was Reggie Llewellyn, and we knew his bark was really not as bad as it may have seemed. He was quite a character, but few knew that he saved up all his sweet tokens during the year to provide the choristers with sweets at this event.



I remember with great pleasure singing from the Minstrel's Gallery on the first Sunday after Christmas. A spiral staircase inside the north wall of the Nave accessed the Gallery. I often thought that this space should have been used more often since the sound of the choir was wonderful and permeated right throughout the building, even to the Lady Chapel at the far eastern end of the Quire. Although this does not happen these days, the Choir used to process from one point to the other to sing music in connection with the seven station of the cross by using the galleries. I suspect the health and safety officers would view this with horror these days.

On Sunday evenings, films in black and white borrowed from the chemists Hinton Lake in Exeter entertained us. One of which I remember well was Nanook of the North, a story based on the life of a typical Eskimo family. Charlie Chaplin and other comedians such as Laurel and Hardy provided a regular change of diet. We were thrilled to bits to hear that the Headmaster was shortly going to show us a film in colour starring Laurence Olivier, with battles scenes, called Henry V. However, the school did not have sufficient money to hire this, so it was decided to use what is now the refectory and charge admission to anyone living in The Close, to make up the difference. This proved to be so successful that some of the junior boys had to sit on the floor on hassocks.

The profit from the event would go towards a summer couch outing. This decision was not one that I personally favoured, as I was inevitably sick on these outings. I only gained some comfort from the fact that I spent about a week afterwards in the Sanatorium providing me with a bit of peace and quiet. There was, however, one outing in the summer which I really did enjoy when all went to the Ansteys Cove Hotel and sang to the guests. We were then provided with a slap-up tea by the owners, following which we were let loose to rundown the narrow valley to the edge of the sea, making me feel very much at home.



By the end of 1945 my parents had once again moved to a new house, this time to Exeter. Somehow or other the family seemed to be linked to the railway line as our new house stood in a cul-de-sac at the bottom of which, down an embankment, was part of the southern railway, linking the City to Waterloo. During the holidays train spotting was convenient outdoor pursuit, however if it were raining I would be found building balsa wood and tissue model aircraft, the skeletons of which would remain pinned to the table.

I much admire those who were able to continue singing whilst furthering their education. I had no such luck as my A levels results would not have allowed an entrance to one of these places of further education. By this time the daily routine of singing praises to God was fully ingrained in my soul. Being determined to continue to maintain my Choral music at a high level, I formed a choir in 1996 that sang Evensong at the Reading Minster on alternate Wednesday evenings, utilising the other Wednesday for rehearsal purposes.



I did have the opportunity to return to Cathedrals to sing at least twice a year until I was struck down by a major stroke in March 2004, as a result of which my singing voice was taken from me and I was paralysed on the left side of my body, making me wheelchair dependent.



I was lucky enough to have the offer from an experienced Choir Master / Organist to deputise for me until such time as I could take on the full responsibility of the Choir again, including conducting. Poor fellow, at least four years have elapsed since he took up his offer during which time I have maintained by role as Choir Director and on some occasions I have conducted the Introit. Oh, what a delight when I am able to do this – a light bulb comes on inside my head as the Choir responds to my direction.

On Easter Monday 2008 I exchanged memories with my contemporaries. A few of them wished to be included in the stories about our adventures in the Cathedral roof, namely; John Lomax, John Weeks, and two others by telephone later, David Finnamore and Donald Rutter.



Heaven knows why it was thought necessary for this bunch of monkeys to be sent every Saturday morning in crocodile formation to the gymnasium at The Episcopal School, the other side of the iron bridge.

Donald Rutter, far left

It may have been purely sentiment, as I believe the Rev. Treneer had been the head of that school before being appointed to the same position at Exeter Cathedral School. Personally, I always dreaded it, especially the box and the wall bars, and to this day I still have a fear of heights!



Many tears were shed on the first night of the return to school, but the prospect of yet another expedition to the roof space soon cheered people up. As far as I remember only one person made a run for it in order to return to his family by going to the main railway station and then passing through the barriers in London to catch a train to a station in Kent. He was soon repatriated from his home to school, much to the joy of Dr. Wilcock who considered him to be his best organist pupil. This young man eventually became elevated to a high position in the career of his choice.

There must be a correlation in all this, but I am unable to work it out! I do hope you enjoyed reading this contribution that I hope will appear in your favourite magazine. In spite of my infirmity the focus on my year is set on Easter Monday when I can once again exchange memories with my old colleagues.

Bob Norman (Old Chorister 1945 – 1951). Bob passed away on 2nd June 2009. A celebration of Bob's life was held at Reading Minster of St. Mary the Virgin on 18th June 2009.



*Exeter Cathedral Chorister
1945 – 1951*

