



ECOCA Newsletter February 2012

Contents

Editor's letter
Installations and Investitures
Life as a Chorister 2012
Cathedral Choir Tour:
Serena Purslow (OC)
David Davies (Assistant
Director of Music)

Robert Knowles RIP
Memories of the 1960s
ECOCA – Early Memories
Memories of the 40s and 50s



Letter from the Editor

Dear Members

Welcome to the ECOCA newsletter for February 2012. After threatening to publish a Summer newsletter for the last two years, I've not quite managed it...

Thank you very much to all those people who have sent me contributions following my first two attempts at editing your newsletter. I am already saving some material for our next edition.

As always, I would be very happy to receive any news, memories of chorister life, or ideas for improving the newsletter in the future. Please feel free to contact me at anytime:

Matthew Ryan
Top Floor Flat
8A Islingword Street
Brighton
BN2 9UR

Email: matthewryan06@yahoo.co.uk

Tel: 07980 853 671

News: Installations and Investitures



The installation of Stephen Yeo, B.Mus (hons) L.T.C.L (Mus.Ed) M.P.Q.H as Headmaster of Exeter Cathedral School was confirmed at Evensong on Tuesday 10th May 2011. The service was attended by staff and governors of the school.



The installation of girl choristers Lauren Benson, Elizabeth Coldrick and Lillian Gibbs was confirmed at Mattins on Sunday 18th September. The service also witnessed the investiture of senior girl choristers Ekaterina Barkeralova, Roisin Goodall, Laura Gray, Hannah Jewell, Esme Ledgard, and Eleanor Smith.

The installation of boy chorister Kit Oliver-Stevens and choral scholars Harry Castle and Edward Woodhouse was confirmed at Evensong on Sunday 18th September. The service also witnessed the investiture of senior boy choristers Simeon Coton, Ben Peacock, Freddie Shere, and Rufus Shire.

Life as an Exeter Cathedral Chorister in 2012

Oran Friar: Year 7

Being a Chorister was something I always wanted to be. It also meant that I had to make some sacrifices including loss of free time. It all started at the phone call “We would like to inform you that Oran has been accepted as a probationer” Canon Turner shouted down the phone. First up were morning practices at 8.15am. This meant 6.30am starts but although it was tiring it was always fun and worthwhile. Next came the weekend services that filled half a day up and with other weekend commitments it really was a time spender. But as I got used to it I enjoyed it more and more because having the opportunity to sing in the Cathedral was thrilling. Then once I was installed it really stepped up for me as I had to fit all the week and weekend services around other commitments, but I always felt it was worthwhile to sing in the choir. The Old Chorister skittles and the pantomime organised by Sally Sedgman are the great social parts of being a Chorister around all the services so we get a totally varied life.



Simeon Coton: Year 8



As a Chorister, you need to be reliable and to be able to withstand pressure from other people around you. When you first join the Choir everything is new and intimidating, but this will only really last a day or so and then you settle in. Another thing when you first join the Choir, you have very little confidence in what you are doing, but you gain confidence

after the first few weeks. (But it usually comes back at your first solo). Once past that little event you enjoy the rest of your time singing and you will never forget your time at Exeter Cathedral and School and hopefully set you up for later life.

Ellie Smith: Year 8

I can't imagine that being a Chorister today is much different to a hundred years ago. We sing beautiful music and will do until we leave the school. But today, and for all of the years I have been singing in the Cathedral, I feel privileged to be one of the thousands of Choristers to sing in the Cathedral over the past 950 years.

One of my most vivid Cathedral experiences is Christmas. I board at Christmas, so my day starts with a wake up call from friends. The girls have the 'delightful' privilege of waking up the boys with pots, pans and wet paper towels at Christmas, and then after we get the boys to come downstairs we open presents.



Once in school uniform, we go over to the Cathedral to sing Eucharist, after which comes Christmas lunch – always the same delicious starter, roast and dessert, mmmm! Then after some waiting we sing Evensong. This is my favourite part of being a chorister – Christmas!

I also recently went on tour to Ireland with the girls, boys and men of the Choir. I adored every moment as it was an unbelievable experience! Being a chorister has changed my life by being part of a team and atmosphere unliveable by anyone else.

Exeter Cathedral Choir Tour to Ireland 2011, by Serena Purslow

On Saturday 9th July twenty excited Choristers and the men of the Choir, Mr Tanner, Mr Millington, Canon Turner and Mrs Turner with the daughter Rachel and Mr. and Mrs Yeo gathered outside the Chantry at 1.30pm to board our coach and leave for St. David's in Wales. There was lots of luggage, boxes of food and water, and cases of robes and music to be loaded, but by 2pm everyone was on the bus and we were ready to leave. We collected the 21st Chorister near Wells and then it was full pelt up the motorway to St. David's. The choristers were staying at a "Farms for City Children" site which is the Charity that the author Michael Morpurgo supports.

On Sunday morning the Choristers had a Eucharist in one of the fields on the farm led by Canon Turner. It was so restful having a service on the cliff whilst listening to the birds and the sea and gazing at the dramatic scenery. The Cathedral at St. David's is a beautiful gothic Cathedral, and after the Eucharist we sang Mattins with the girl Choristers of St. David's Cathedral and then headed for our ferry to Ireland.



On the ferry the Choir sang a few songs including a song from “Sister Act” which the Year 8’s sang, accompanied by some interesting harmonies from the Gentlemen of the Choir. A very tired Choir arrived at Dean’s Hall Student Accommodation (which was to be our home for the week) at 9pm and after a few mugs of hot chocolate everyone was ready for a good night’s sleep.

Monday 11th July saw the Choir travelling to Waterford where we went to the beach to play games with a parachute. Then we went into the Waterford crystal shop, where we found a crystal bear costing £30,000!! Canon Turner had previously warned us not to touch anything in case of breakages and a lot of pocket money deductions.

Our concert started at 7.30pm and the performance included the full Choir, Boys and Men, Girls, and Men and some organ pieces performed by David Davies. The audience applauded warmly and although the concert finished at 9.30pm it was 11.30pm before we got back to our rooms.

Tuesday was a very warm day, and we needed to pass the bottle of sun cream around. We visited Fota Wildlife Park, where we saw animals of all sorts, from ducks to giraffes. I really enjoyed going there as many of the animals weren’t in an enclosure so you could get up really close to them. We sang Evensong in St. Fin Barre’s Cathedral at 5pm and then went out for a delicious meal in Cork.

On Wednesday we went to the Blarney Castle to kiss the Blarney stone for good luck. Although there was a man who took our photos, the shop was trying to get away with selling them for 10 Euros!! That’s Irish Blarney all right. It was scary when you had to kiss the stone as you had to lean right back over the edge, only being supported by two iron bars. Our concert in the evening at Lismore Cathedral was very well received by a small audience.



Thursday was a relaxing day as we didn't have to be out until 11am. We went shopping in Cork in pairs until lunch. We went to a lovely food market where we found a patisserie with the most amazing cakes that had us all drooling. We had lunch out and then returned to our flats for some time to relax while some of the boys went out to play sports. At 6pm the Choir walked to the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul and we performed our last concert to a big audience who gave us a standing ovation at the end.

We were all up early on Friday morning and gathered on the bus at 5am after last minute packing and loading of suitcases to leave for the ferry. By 9.30am we were all on the ferry and enjoying a good English/Irish breakfast. We landed at 12.30pm and battled with Friday evening traffic, eventually returning to the Chantry at 7pm.

The tour was an amazing experience. We met lovely people, visited beautiful places and had lots of fun together. Being a Chorister can be hard work, but we are all so privileged to have so many opportunities for fascinating visits, to meet interesting people, and to enjoy being together, making beautiful music as well as having lots of opportunities for fun.

Exeter Cathedral Choir Tour to Ireland, by David Davies (Assistant Director of Music)



After a blaze of activity that brought the Cathedral Choir's summer term to a close, 21 boy and girl choristers, 10 gentlemen, and 7 staff members from the Cathedral



and ECS embarked on what turned out to be a most successful and enjoyable tour of Ireland. Travelling via coach and ferry we visited St. David's Cathedral in Pembrokeshire on the way, singing Mattins with the Cathedral Choir there in that magnificent building. Our choristers stayed at Treginnis Farm (part of the City Farms for Children Project) the whole experience providing a stimulating beginning to our travels.

Both the outward and return journeys on the ferry were blissfully calm. All the arrangements went equally smoothly, and we were fortunate to have an excellent coach driver whose adroit and fearless reversing skills won the admiration of all the gents of the Cathedral Choir. While the coach journeys were inevitably long, any dullness was soon mitigated by the airing of the Acting Dean's DVD collection of musicals, and we eventually arrived in Cork – each of us a Julie Andrews in the making – to take up residence in self-catering apartments close to St. Fin Barre's Cathedral.

Our first concert engagement was in Waterford Cathedral, a wonderful Classical building with lively acoustics. We found here the stereotypical welcome that was the hallmark of our stay, and, whilst the sizes of the audiences varied, the length and sincerity of the applause we received was most heartening. There was a chance to visit the famous Waterford crystal shop, and a brief chance to see this delightful city.

A visit to Fota wildlife park was one of the highlights of the tour, together with a visit to Cobh Cathedral, that E.W. Pugin masterpiece set in a commanding position above Queenstown Harbour (the last port of call of RMS Titanic in 1912). Blarney Castle proved a fascinating diversion, several of us decided to undertake the acrobatic manoeuvre required to kiss the Blarney stone.



St. Fin Barre's Cathedral is surely one of the greatest of monuments to the High Victorian Gothic revival, and, having welcomed its Cathedral Choir to sing in Exeter earlier this year it was good for us to sing Choral Evensong there. We gave two more concerts, at St. Carthage's Cathedral (Church of Ireland) Lismore and SS Peter and Paul (RC) Cork respectively. We were welcomed and appreciated with much warmth, and were fortunate to sing in buildings with generous and supportive acoustics. I have to say how well the choir sang throughout, and must echo what the parish priest of SS Peter and Paul said in his closing comments, that the concert had been as much a spiritual experience as a performance. This was clearly a sentiment felt by all in attendance.

The non-musical aspects of the tour were most successful: some good shopping opportunities, many wonderful (and large!) meals, and a great sense of camaraderie. This was the last opportunity for the year 8 choristers to sing together, and was therefore a poignant time for them. We also said farewell to three choral scholars who now embark on their academic musical careers.

The complex network of fund-raising and administration necessary for this choir tour is hugely appreciated, and resulted in a most rewarding, fun and successful end to a busy term!

Peter Knowles RIP

We have received the sad news that Peter Knowles has died aged 93. Peter was a chorister between 1929-35, the earliest period for any member of Exeter Cathedral Old Chorister Association. His funeral was held at the church where he played the organ for many years in Aisholt near Bridgwater on Monday 22 August 2011.



'A little short' – Memories of the 1960s by Charles Roberts (ECOCA Chair)

It's funny how nicknames stick. Once established they tend to stay with you. Hence my reputation as 'Mighty Mouse', a name coined in 1962, but which remained with me throughout my Choir School career. But I am ahead of myself.

It was 1960 and the question posed for my parents was what to do with a child of apparently poor academic prospects whose only talent it seemed was to be able to reproduce tunes accurately on demand. With various house moves, I had already attended four schools in a little over two years, and so it was decided to audition for Exeter. I was seven years old, three foot six inches tall, and I remember the audition process clearly.

Lionel Dakers sat at a piano in the dining room, greeting me warmly, and inviting me to sing what I had rehearsed a hundred times with my mother, that old favourite Psalm 23. It seemed to go quite well. We then did some exercises, picking out notes from chords, identifying intervals - Lionel seemed satisfied, I was relieved. But then disaster! Nobody had mentioned there would be some sums to do, or an English test. This had failure written all over it. And yes, I did fail spectacularly anything that required a pencil in hand, but lucky for me, my voice carried me through. There was just one condition to starting the following September. I needed to GROW!

Almost a year later, September 1961 I arrived at school, still three feet six inches! The school in 1961 was stable after a somewhat rocky few years, with a caring Head (Tom Evans) and an equally caring Matron (Miss Ward – no honestly!). The boarding school housed around 26 boys, but day boys had recently been introduced and the school had



expanded to 60. I settled into the routine quickly, with choir practices before the school day began, and again after lunch before afternoon lessons. Piano practice sessions were timetabled after school, before supper, and the daily Evensong. The teaching staff as I remember them was a mixture of terrifying and almost too gentle. Mr Downs, English, was far too gentle and an obvious target for little boys' mischief. I don't think he ever understood why we rarely paid attention, but he didn't deserve our farewell gift to him, a tortoiseshell comb for his bald pate!

Mr Edwards, Latin, on the other hand I found truly scary; a firebrand Welsh clergyman who flung exercise books across the classroom with gay abandon. Miss Van der Kiste (newly qualified) reasonable, Miss Davis, Maths, intimidating, Mr Pocock, Geography, nutcase who got his comeuppance one day playing for Plymouth Argyle where he got a bit trampled on! Much rejoicing in the common room. But with Tom Evans at the helm, a kindly Matron, and music staff who seemed very caring, it was a decent place to be.

As already mentioned my height had been an issue, and not least at Christmas and Easter. It was on these occasions that the Bishop attended the main Cathedral service and 'blessed the choristers'. Bishop Mortimer would solemnly move down the row of choristers intoning "the Lord bless you and keep you" over each one, until he came to me. Sometimes I think he thought there was just a gap, but there I was, and he would make an extra effort to reach down and manage to touch my head for the blessing. I always appreciated his efforts.

Like any small organisation there was a pecking order, and as we all went through the school, so our levels of seniority progressed. I never had the voice that would make me a Head Chorister (I left that to the Pikes of this world) but I managed to get to the place of one below –



an 'end' on Cantoris. I had been through the 'hacking' process during practices – that system of learning whereby your immediate senior would give you a kick if you didn't immediately acknowledge your mistake with a raised hand, thereby letting the Choir Master know it was 'you', and allowing the practice to continue uninterrupted. And with a daily Evensong, and the three services on Sundays, our ability to read music off the page became rather remarkable. And I suspect for most of us, we can still do that quite well.

I was promoted to a Prefect, but that was more about recognising my advancing age than my stature. Sometime around 1965 an article appeared in the local newspaper, and it concerned two choir members. One of them was a long-standing Bass Lay Clerk, and the other was me, so the article was headed, 'Exeter Cathedral's longest serving Lay Clerk, and shortest Chorister'! Even after four years at the school my height remained a challenge. Hence 'Mighty Mouse.'

I left the Choir School in 1967 having experienced one of the best musical groundings I think we can ever receive. Lionel Dakers and his deputy Chris Gower were still there, as was Tom Evans, and my memories are universally happy ones. It is true I generally kept myself out of trouble, I was one of those 'reliable boys'.

While it took me time to find my academic edge (or something!) the school gave me a remarkable background that served me well in my later musical career as a professional Bass player. Probably the most unlikely instrument to choose, but then I wasn't called 'mouse', back then I was 'Mighty Mouse'!!



“Mighty Mouse” – second on the left

ECOCA – Early Memories by Geoffrey Mitchell (Old Chorister 1944-50)

As a temporary interruption to my - now regular - delvings into the recesses of my childhood memories with the “rambling jottings of an Old Chorister”, I was persuaded by the Secretary and Simon Swan over a post-committee meeting pint to put down some of my recollections about the early days of the Association.

Before I go into any detail it is interesting to recall that in my last year (1949) Mr Treneer gathered the three prefects together to discuss the possibilities of forming just such an association. And although we boys



had little idea of how it might work, I can well recall that we – even then – decided that the most effective day would be Easter Monday. For not only would the Cathedral choir still be in residence (in 1949, remember, we sang full Cathedral services through to, and including, Low Sunday!) but also schools and universities would be on vacation and the general workforce enjoying a Bank Holiday. All in all a perfect solution and so it has remained to this day. It is hardly surprising that we at Exeter enjoy one of the largest turn-outs in The Federation for our annual reunion.

Alas nothing came of the idea for another fifteen years. By way of salvation came Marcus Knight from St Paul's as Dean, and his appointment of Lionel Dakers to the organ loft, and the remarkable and charismatic new Headmaster in the person of Tom Evans, who quickly restored both the school's finances, and more importantly, its reputation. It is to these latter two that we owe our existence.

I was singing at St Paul's myself when my attention was drawn to an advertisement in the national press for old choristers of Exeter to make themselves known to the school, with a view to founding an Old Chorister Association.

A committee was assembled and an inaugural meeting was held in the Cloister Room on April 21st 1964, with the Headmaster as Chairman – a situation which prevailed until Christopher Hellier thought it more appropriate that we should appoint a Chairman from amongst our own members. The committee consisted of a wonderfully eccentric (or so it seemed) and charismatic Edgar Herbert as Secretary; Frank Cotton, Treasurer and also John Baker, Howard Crawshaw, and a Mr R M Brown. Alas none of these is still with us, but they were a very forward-looking bunch. Immediately they sought membership of the Federation on the suggestion of Geoffrey Timms, and very soon began talking about a Benevolent or Bursary Fund.



This may be the opportunity to stress that for an Old Chorister Association to thrive, it must have the enthusiastic support of both the Cathedral Organist and the Headmaster. I have seen far too many in the Federation struggle without those vital factors. We have been particularly fortunate at Exeter, for both Lionel's successors – Lucien Nethsingha and now Andrew Millington – have been immensely keen to welcome us and, most importantly, to encourage us to sing. And among the significant early Headmasters to be thanked must be Ian Watson, Harry Potts who went on to Westminster Abbey Choir School, and Christopher Hellier, leaving to found the first Cathedral Girl's Choir at Salisbury.

However this article is not the occasion for a comprehensive history of the Association. This is a personal recollection of a few of my own experiences as I remember them.

A newsletter arrived from Herbert in the September 1964, which I still have, and we were encouraged to subscribe to a dinner the following Easter, 19th April, 1965. The following March saw the arrival of a postcard from him (again which I still possess!) urging us all to attend. I cannot remember how many people were there though we made a substantial contribution to Walmisley in D minor and Blessed be the God and Father, so I think there were perhaps thirty or forty of us.

I arrived a little late (my London duties prevented me from getting there earlier) and as I approached the golden gates I heard this tremendous sound emerging from the Choir and was honestly rather terrified and – yes, shy - of entering. But Michael Hagyard saw me hovering from his place in the stalls and waved to me to join him! It was a most uplifting occasion, and I suppose we can say history was being made. (But actually we were only re-making history, as Stan Packman in his researches in the Cathedral archives during the '80s found reference to old choristers' dinners in the early years of the



20th century – so I presume the First World War was responsible, as with so many other institutions, for its demise.)

After dinner at the Rougemont hotel there was a brief AGM, and that pattern continued for a few years before it was thought more fitting to meet immediately after Evensong and enjoy dinner afterwards. The production of a Tie was proposed at that first meeting. It was also proposed that John Lomax join the committee which he did for a while, and it is particularly pleasing that we now see him regularly again.

I was unable to attend the second reunion as I had to fly to Prague on a Radio 3 assignment – the only meeting I have ever missed! For purely financial reasons the 1966 dinner was held at The Chevalier Restaurant (appropriately enough with a Knight as our Dean) and the AGM was chaired by Frank Cotton as the Headmaster was not available, and the Secretary too ill to attend.

Alas we lost our energetic Secretary during the early months of 1967 and a Memorial Service was held for him on February 28th. At the Easter Monday 1967 reunion Frank Cotton was elected Secretary and Treasurer, posts he served with enthusiasm and aplomb for a great number of years. It was also announced that we had been accepted as official members of the Federation, of which Edgar Herbert would have been so proud.

At that '67 AGM it was decided to invite the 6 senior choristers to the tea, and for Old Choristers to read the lessons. It's wonderful to see how far back these traditions were established.

The dinner venue has changed over the years, as fewer places were able to staff a dinner on Easter Monday. For some years we ate either at The Clarence or at the White Hart. On one occasion through



desperation the dinner was at the Red Cow (or some such name) – a burger cafe on North Street. I remember the Dean sitting at a small round plastic table amongst the ketchup bottles officiating over the proceedings. Not a highpoint of our annual meetings! But we survived.

Another occasion is memorable, again for all the wrong reasons. We arrived in Exeter on the Monday morning to find Frank Cotton in a rare state of panic. He had gone to the Chevalier restaurant with the final tally of numbers for the evening dinner to find it bolted and barred, with, on the door, notice of liquidation of the company. Here was he, with 60 or 70 people coming to dinner on a Bank Holiday Monday with nowhere to take them and no food for them to eat! By some miraculous means he contacted a catering company and found furniture for us all so that could use the Chapter House. Solution of a sort, but the Chapter House was unheated in those days, and the air, as well as the food by the time it reached the tables was stone cold, and while the white wine may have benefited, the red was virtually undrinkable at that temperature. But we survived - again!

In 1978 it had been thought an attraction to the younger members if we contracted the reunion into one single day, and hold our official meal after Eucharist - at lunchtime, the Chantry providing the premises. This was fine as far as it went, but unfortunately the Secretary also arranged an evening dinner for “the over-18s”, which I severely criticised as being the very sort of elitism we were seeking to avoid. If the younger members were specifically NOT invited to everything they would stop coming was my argument. And I took a few off to a restaurant in protest! At least it didn't happen again!

As soon as 1969 the Bursary Fund was established and a Constitution agreed. In the early '70s it was proposed that we host a Federation Festival in 1975. But as the years drew nigh it was realised that we



simply hadn't prepared well enough, and sought to swap with Sheffield who were down for 1983. Luckily they agreed and so it was that we held a most successful festival - our first – in that year. Subsequently we saw out the last millennium with our second festival in 1999, and are now committed to 2015 – the year after our Golden Jubilee. I think we all need to think hard and deep about what we can do to contribute to the proceedings! To those of you who haven't attended, the annual Federation Festivals are great fun and a huge opportunity to show the world what we do – and how well we do it!

One of the highlights of our existence must be the Silver Jubilee celebrations in 1989. Our Chairman, Nick Pedlar, went to enormous pains to make it a special occasion. Sponsors for Champagne, for flowers and for engraved wine goblets were sought and found. Invitations to other Associations elicited a handful of their representatives, and a dinner dance at The Rougemont capped the proceedings. I commissioned a special anthem from Richard Shephard, who'd been an old singing pupil of mine, – The Strife is O'er – which is still sung regularly at Eastertide. If our Golden Jubilee is anything like so successful, we are in for a treat!

Recent years have seen small but significant changes in the dinner pattern: the Exeter Motel, the Golf Club – very good but a bit expensive – St Olave's which attracted great approval. As in the '60s a Bank Holiday Monday is not an easy time to arrange large dinner functions due to the difficulty of hiring staff, and we are extremely grateful to those members of the committee who spend a lot of time and trouble seeking the solutions. I think we all agree that for all the heartfelt nostalgia of singing again in our own *alma mater*, the camaraderie of the dinner must remain the highlight of our day, and it is important that we get it right. Those early pioneers in 1964 got it right from the very start and we owe it to them to continue the good work. Viva ECOCA!



Memories of the 40s and 50s by Simon Farrow (Old Chorister 1948-1953)

Geoffrey Mitchell's reminiscences of his time at The Choristers' School, as it was then known, has stirred up some of my memories, particularly in respect of the Treneers. Patron was indeed a wonderful man, and he got me out of several scrapes.

Does anyone remember that we used to get a parcel full of Alka-Seltzer every few months from the USA? Apparently a relative of Patron's (his brother, perhaps) is said to have invented the stuff, he supposedly receiving something like 5 cents for every bottle sold and he shared his good fortune with us by sending us this rather unsettling (pun not intended) bromide.

Remember when the shed burned down? It was 5th November one year and the fireworks were stored in the shed in the yard. Apparently an errant rocket made its way in through a window which wasn't glazed, and set the whole lot off, all at once. A splendid, if somewhat short-lived event.

Cricket in the back yard was a favourite, and the wicket was a cement roller on end. The greatest glory was attained by hitting the ball over the top of the school and having it land in the backyard. I almost did it once, but unfortunately it fell short and hit Mrs. Treneer, who was standing on the fire escape, in the face, breaking her glasses.

There was a well in that backyard, just under Mr. Birley's window. Said well was a repository for those abysmal stale buns that we were fed mid-morning. Mr. B. caught us depositing buns one day as he leant out of his window, and we received a caning; not before we had armoured ourselves with blotting paper (blotch) though. And talking



of food, remember those great shallow trays in the kitchen which were filled to a shallow depth with milk, then left on the stove for many hours to skim off the cream for the teachers and staff? We got the residue.

And the men of the choir: the one I remember the least favourably was Mr. Thomas, who ate Meloids perpetually, and was known to spit them down the necks of the boys in front of him. Ahh, the good old days. I could write a book, but not just yet.

God bless all Exeter Choristers, past present and future.



Simon Farrow – back row, far left