



ECOCA Newsletter

February 2014

Contents

Editor's letter

News: ECOCA Golden Jubilee
ECOCA Reunion 2013
Choir Tour 2013

Messages from Old Choristers
Memories from 1944-49
50 Years of Gordon Pike

Back from the Editor



Dear Members

Welcome to the ECOCA Newsletter February 2014. This is the fourth edition I have put together, and I am grateful for the positive feedback I received on our previous newsletter. As ever, I would be very happy to receive any news or contributions for future editions. I would also be grateful for ideas about the content and format of future newsletters, including how we engage Old Choristers of all generations.

We have started sending out the newsletter in both electronic and paper format, bowing to the onward march of the digital age. I'm afraid I've been a bit slow on the uptake of social media, including the Facebook. I will endeavour to keep up with the technological change, albeit two steps behind, going forwards. Please feel free to contact me at anytime with your news or ideas:

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ECOCA Golden Jubilee

This year marks the 50th Anniversary of the Exeter Cathedral Old Choristers Association, which we will celebrate on Easter Monday 21st April 2014. Our annual dinner will be held in the Cavendish room at the Rougemont Hotel after Evensong.

We are hoping that some businesses would like to take the opportunity to sponsor a table at our reunion dinner. If you know of any businesses that might be willing to sponsor a table for £25.00, then please get in touch with Simon Swan: simonjswan@gmail.com



ECOCA Reunion 2013: Gordon Pike

This year the run up to Easter was very busy because the school term did not end until Maundy Thursday. There was no time to put on the Choristers' Frank Cotton Memorial Skittles luncheon so we decided that ECOCA would pay for the sports hall where the Chorister sports were played, instead of them being outside in the freezing weather.

On Good Friday morning we all wrapped up and went for a walk down the River Exe, and nearly reached Countess Wear before we turned round and walked back to school to enjoy a picnic lunch. All the services for Good Friday and Easter Sunday went very well and before we knew it Easter Monday had arrived.

As I stood outside the Chantry I could not believe that twelve months had passed by so quickly. Cars began to arrive and Old Choristers came to collect a car pass so that they could park for the day. When I went into the Cathedral, over fifty Old Choristers were singing the Eucharist with the choir. At least three quarters of them were the younger generation and they were doing a good job.

By Evensong the numbers had increased to 86 and the Chapter House was buzzing during the tea with plenty of chat going on. As always the cream scones went down very well. It was a good job extra chairs had been put into the Choir because they were all taken, and a few people were resting on tombs and communion rails when they were sitting for lessons and prayers.

As always the music went very well and Stanford in C Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis were a good choice and extracts of Handel's Messiah with the Hallelujah Chorus raised the roof and was very exhilarating. A wonderful experience shared by people who had given up part of their lives to produce something special with the gift of a voice.



I joined as a Cathedral Chorister in January 1963 and in January 2013 I had completed fifty years as a boy and man singing in the Choir. I hope to continue for a few more years and all I can say is that I have really enjoyed it and I don't really know where all the years have gone.

After Evensong old friends caught up and carried on talking outside the Choir, and then we went on to St Olave's Hotel for dinner where Barry Rose was the guest speaker. The Bishop and his wife attended as our Patron for the last time before he retired and the Dean and his wife attended for the first time as President of the Association. They all seemed to enjoy themselves and a good night was had by all.

There was a considerable amount of fun had by the people selling the draw tickets and £280.00 was collected. There was an auction of a framed photograph of the choir which went for a £100.00 to the choir tour fund to help with the trip to Vienna in July 2013.

Then there was a surprise – David Acres stood up and started to talk about his days as a chorister back in the sixties and then I realised he was talking about me. The Old Choristers wanted to mark my fifty years singing at Exeter Cathedral as a boy and man in the Cathedral Choir.

At the end of his speech he presented me with a box of CD's titled *The Complete Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis* sung by many Cathedral Choirs. I have to say I am really enjoying listening to them, even though I am only on CD No.5. When I retire I hope to have more time to listen to them. Thank you to all who contributed to this wonderful gift.

The Dean brought the dinner to an end and by midnight everyone had gone their separate ways. Another wonderful reunion well attended and thoroughly enjoyed. On to next year which is our Golden Jubilee from when the Association started in 1964.



Cathedral Choir Tour 2013: David Davies

On Friday July 12th the upper years of boy and girl choristers, together with the gentlemen of the choir, staff and chaperones, set off first thing to embark on what transpired to be a most successful and enjoyable week in the land of Mozart, wiener schnitzel, rococo elegance and, as it happened, brilliant sunshine to rival the UK's heat-wave.

Some of the choristers had never flown before so that was one of the 'firsts' for the children. The gentlemen of the choir soon got busy on the upright pianos available for public use around Heathrow's Terminal 3, and were not that far off from taking requests and tips. All the travel arrangements seemed to go pretty much to plan, and we landed in Vienna in time to enjoy our first sampling of Viennese food.

We were privileged to sing in some of the city's finest churches. Several people had asked if we were to sing in the Stephansdom - a remarkable and unusual conflation of Romanesque, Gothic and Baroque styles that has its present architectural roots in the fourteenth-century - but this was not included in our musical schedule this time. While it is impressive in its heft, the Cathedral cannot be described as a beautiful building, and we were treated instead to several of Vienna's opulent churches, many of which display the glorious apex of that Baroque architectural expression which emphasised the iron fist of the Counter-Reformation with heaps of gold leaf and swathes of fresco. We were welcomed most kindly by each priest, congregation and audience, with a graciousness that was appreciated greatly.

Our first venue was the Lichtentaler Pfarrkirche, where we sang a Vigil Mass on the Saturday evening, the choristers having first enjoyed an interactive day at the Natural History Museum. The Lichtentaler is closely associated with Franz Schubert, who was baptised and received his musical liturgical training there, and the building is known



colloquially as the Schubertkirche. Throughout the tour, Andrew Millington had decided to include some music for the choir to sing with which Viennese audiences might be less familiar, and this wisely, in a city that is, essentially, a living testament to a major part of the history of the Western musical canon: there is absolutely no shortage of Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, Brahms, Bruckner (et al) to be had in Vienna, from symphonies to fridge magnets! It was Philip Moore's fine *Missa in Tempore Paschali* that formed, therefore, the Ordinary of the Mass at the Schubertkirche. We also sang some Anglican chant, leading one to suspect that this was possibly the first time this had been done there!

Following Mass, the choir moved to the chancel steps and gave a short concert to a most appreciative audience. The programme featured works by Palestrina, Tallis, Lalouette, Rutter, Grieg, Sally Beamish, Britten and Wood, all of which resounded splendidly in the warm and flattering acoustic. When, subsequently on the tour, we did sing works by composers associated with Vienna, those performances certainly took on a special significance: Bruckner's *Virga Jesse*, for example, gained an extra dimension just by virtue of proximity.

David at the organ of the Augustinerkirche





One of the most notable places for liturgical music in Vienna is the Augustinerkirche, where an orchestral mass provides the weekly musical offering. The church - as rich in its historical alliance with the Habsburg dynasty as it is in its soaring, linear gothic - boasts a phenomenal acoustic: this was something the choir encountered in other churches too, and something which amazed us all. On Sunday morning, we sang Jean Langlais' powerful Messe Solennelle, an experience that none of us will soon forget. The combination of a fantastically well-coordinated and stylish liturgy, with absolutely superb (at times hair-raising) singing from the choir, made this a musical high-point in the week, a feeling that was augmented by the most awe-inspiring improvisation by the organist of the Augustinerkirche that left us spell-bound, and by the tremendous welcome we received.

The Anglican Parish in Vienna, Christ Church, has a fascinating history. The church building itself, although designed by a Bratislavan, stands in stark contrast to other styles of Viennese architecture, as it can be nothing other than a nod to Protestant, Victorian gothic. While it may lack the opulence and loftiness of its Roman Catholic counterparts, it is home to a vibrant community close to the British Embassy, and, on Sunday afternoon, the choir was welcomed to sing a typical BCP Evensong (with reduced choral forces as the church is not large), followed by a remarkable tea that included Sachertorte (the local chocolate cake, moist, three-tiered with apricot jam, iced, just heavenly) and hot cross buns, two foods not often found at the same table. We felt so at home culturally that Canon Turner was prompted to ask, 'When is the bingo going to start?'

Monday morning provided some free time for the choristers to enjoy the amusement park at the Prater, and, for those of us too creaky to get on roller-coasters, an opportunity to look at the city or to enjoy the odd 'Wiener melange', Vienna's version of the cappuccino.



Later that day, we headed to the Peterskirche, the venue for our second concert, an early eighteenth-century monument inspired by St Peter's, Rome, and reputed to be built on the earliest Christian site in Vienna. Our evening concert was well received, and there were certain pieces which sounded especially glorious in the space (Paul Mealor's *Ubi caritas*, written for the marriage of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, was one that evoked, under Stephen Tanner's careful guidance, a particularly warm response). Singing in such generous acoustics is quite a challenge for the Cathedral Choir compared with the relative dryness of Exeter. One realised quite how gratifying it can be when a resonant building does so much to complement the human voice.

The United Nations came to Austria in 1980, the third UN site to be created after New York and Geneva. Situated on a piece of land that is separated by the Old and New Danube, it is housed in the Vienna International Centre, a complex that is perhaps the most iconic example of twentieth-century Austrian architecture in Vienna.



The Choristers at the United Nations



Its entrance way, the Rotunda, provided the venue for a short, informal concert on Wednesday to entertain diplomats, workers and passers-by alike, before we were given a fabulous lunch (which several felt was the best meal all week!). There followed a fascinating tour for the adults, when we learned just exactly what the UN does. As the complex is a place both of heightened security and a territory that exists outside Austrian jurisdiction, the whole choir was subject to airport-style security-screening. This all went swimmingly until Mr Pike's stash of coinage (i.e. the choristers' pocket money) set everything off. Something similar having happened in Heathrow, he won the prize for being the most-frisked member of the team.....

The Votivkirche was the location of the choir's final concert which took place on Thursday evening. Again, we dealt with a big acoustic, although this time probably just a bit too cavernous for comfort. In spite of this, the concert went well, and was warmly received. The choristers and gentlemen gave fine performances, and this to native audiences, who are not used to a uniquely English timbre of choral sound, something that is wholly different from the continental style of the Vienna Boys' Choir, for example. Thus we concluded our musical excursion, and took to bed before a final day of travelling home.

The complex network of operations needed to ensure a tour like this can happen at all is considerable. The success of this tour owes huge amounts to several people: to parents of the choristers for their financial support; to Canon Turner, Alison Turner, Canon Morter, Ann Barwood and Chryssa Turner for their combined skills of logistical planning, chaperoning and looking after the choristers; to Gordon Pike for his hard work; to Andrew Millington and Stephen Tanner for their musical initiative and direction; to John Turner for transporting music. Many thanks to all for a wonderful and memorable week.

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Messages from Old Choristers.

Two Old Choristers wrote in response to the memories of John Lomax, published in the last newsletter. Simon Farrow (1949 -53) reported that the alto's name which John couldn't remember was Mr. Thomas, who ate Meloids incessantly and spat them down the necks of the boys in front of him!



Simon Farrow, fifth from the right front row, Cantoris 1953

George Geere (1952-57) wrote to express how he enjoyed very much the Lomax memoirs, and inherited some of the personalities he mentions when he arrived in '52. George noted that the main reason the choristers liked cold baths in the winter in his day was that the pipes were very often frozen!

John Lomax also contracted the editor to correct an error in the previous newsletter. A line was missed out of John's memories, and he wished to point out that Miss S M Watts was promoted to being in charge after Mr Langhorne died, rather than Mr K H W Gibb.



Memories of a Chorister of Exeter Cathedral 1944 – 1949: John Lomax (*continued*)

On another occasion – 1948 I think it was – the new Bishop – Mortimer – sought out the boys at tea in a marquee in the palace grounds on the occasion of his installation. Despite the presence of many senior church dignitaries he got his priorities right and came to arrange a cricket match between the choir and the clergy. Mr. Treener offered 5/- to the boy who bowled the Bishop out.

On another occasion in the very bad winter of 1947, Mr Treener became involved in a snowball fight against the boys in the forecourt of The Chantry. Wearing cassock and smoking his pipe he offered 2/6 to the first boy to knock his pipe out of his mouth. He liked his pipe – perhaps more than his wife approved of – and would often surreptitiously ask one of the boys to go down to “Ma Wilkies” – the sweet shop and tobacconist at Southgate – for an ounce of Cut Golden Bar.

Occasionally on a winter’s evening when time permitted, Mr. Treener would read to us. One of the most popular books was the Jan Stewer stories; the adventures of an old Devon character written and read in dialect.

Another evening activity in the winter months were silent films on the school’s own 8mm projector. Every week a box would arrive from Wallace Heaton’s in London with 6 or 8 reels of cine film; usually Charlie Chaplin or Keystone Cops. Sometimes we would be really modern when Mr. Keane would visit the school with his 16 mm SOUND Projector! On more than one occasion we saw “The Lost World”.



We also created our own entertainment for others to watch. On one occasion we performed scenes from *The Merchant of Venice* in the Cloister Room using the Cathedral Library as a changing room. On another occasion in the Chapter House it was scenes from *Midsummer Nights Dream*. All the parts were played by the boys, including Titania (Geoffrey Roger Mitchell).

As with any group of boys there was plenty of teasing. One of the boys, Alan Vening, was a brilliant pianist but hated spiders. We would put a spider on the keyboard, put the lid down and then ask him to play for us. When he lifted the lid and saw the spider he would fly into a rage. How cruel little boys can be.

Other members of the Treneer family not yet mentioned were his sister, Ann (or Anne) who, I believe, was an author. She was a fairly frequent visitor to The Chantry. Another lady who we were always pleased to see was daughter Mary who was married to Reverend Coleridge, vicar of Ide just outside Exeter and a descendant of the great poet. Mary was a pretty girl and would sometimes come into the dormitory after we had gone to bed and kiss us goodnight. I don't think anybody slept after that experience.

One day I recall Mr Treneer standing in the entrance hall with his back to the open fire which always burned in the grate during the winter. He was holding his young grand-daughter who was facing the mantelpiece on which stood a vase which Mr Treneer did not really like. The child caught hold of the vase and pulled it off onto the tiled floor smashing it to smithereens. We saw this happening and could probably have stopped it but thought that he would be pleased to see the back of it. I have no doubt he was not too popular with Mrs. Treneer – I can't remember whether the grandchild was Mary's daughter or his son, Cyril's daughter. The final member of the family was Kim, the white long haired mongrel dog.



From time to time the entire school would be invited out to somebody's home by people who were connected with the Cathedral. I recall one such visit to a large hotel in Torquay which had a pathway leading down to its own private beach. Almost every week two choristers used to go to breakfast on a Saturday morning with the Dean, Spencer Carpenter, and his wife at the Deanery. Because of food rationing we had to take a loaf of bread and a pint of milk. It was nice to eat breakfast in a civilised manner rather than with 24 other noisy school boys. From time to time we were also invited in small groups to tea at some of those other beautiful old buildings which are in the Cathedral close. Our hosts included Canon Maclaren (Larry the lamb – because he sounded like him) "Reggie" Llewellyn (a "crusty" old chap whose bark was worse than his bite) the precentor, and Bishop Curzon, the Bishop of Crediton.

Among visitors to the school I remember one being Ralph Vaughan Williams. I still have a vague memory of meeting him and talking to him in our common room. Although I remember him being a friendly sort of chap it still doesn't make me enjoy his music which I find generally very boring.

One outing took the choir by coach to Sherborne where we performed in the Abbey accompanied by the Boyd Neal Orchestra. My most abiding memory is of an excellent meal of "bangers and mash" at a local restaurant. As my parents lived in Weymouth, only about 28 miles away, they were able to attend the performance. Visits from parents during term time were allowed twice a term on a Wednesday afternoon when the choir did not sing at evensong.

In 1948 the Olympic torch was carried through Exeter on its way to London. The whole school stood outside the Guildhall amongst the crowds and cheered the athlete on his way.



The length of a term for probationers was about the same as other schools but choristers stayed on for a couple of weeks longer so our holidays were shorter than most schools. We broke up for Christmas holidays after evensong on Epiphany Sunday, for Easter holidays after evensong on the Sunday after Easter and Summer term ended two weeks later than other schools. Once the probationers went home choristers no longer had school lessons so we had plenty of free time, although Cathedral duties, particularly at Christmas and Easter, kept us busy.

However, an annual treat was a whole day out on a Charabanc to distant parts of Devon and Cornwall. We visited such places as Looe and Polperro, came across the Tamar on the Saltash ferry, Clovelly and Hartland Point in North Devon. The vicar of Hartland was Prebendary Gregory. He invited us to have tea at the Vicarage in his large garden. The setting and the people involved could have come straight out of a Jane Austin novel. We always took our own food with us and any left over when we returned to school was often served up the next day. Meat paste sandwiches were not very popular and so we had them fried for breakfast the following day.

Prebendary Gregory was well known at the Cathedral for making the choristers laugh during his sermons. Not that he was trying to be funny but because of the way he used to deliver his sermons with such passion and fervour. We always made sure we had a handkerchief to stuff in our mouths to stifle our laughter. His most famous sermon, given on more than one occasion, was about how blind men were. Shouting at the congregation and sticking his fist in the air he would exclaim “Men can’t see angels – Donkeys can – Balaams Ass.”

People who hear that Christmas was a busy time spent at school assume that the choristers must have disliked the arrangement.



However, this was not the case – we loved it. We would be awoken on Christmas morning by the sound of the Cathedral bells being peeled just across the road from our dormitory. In the Cathedral we had such wonderful music to sing in the most glorious setting. During evensong we went up to the minstrels gallery to sing carols. This was repeated on (I think) New Year's Day. Once Cathedral duties were over we returned to The Chantry where the Dean, still in his red cassock, came over to distribute our Christmas presents. Later in the evening the entire school, boys and staff, all had an excellent Christmas dinner in Mr. Treneer's dining room. We had a wonderful day and two weeks later went home and had Christmas all over again. The previous day was when we sang, in Latin, the Grandisson service. A very atmospheric service reminiscent of a service in a monastery. The choristers singing the solos would be dressed in long white albs and carry candles in procession. Bishop Grandisson was the Bishop in the 13th century and is responsible for the development of the Cathedral to the magnificent building we know today.



Donald Rutter (1942-48) far left, former secretary of ECOCA



Easter was also a most enjoyable time. During Lent we wore black cassocks and sang Plainsong. During communion services for this period the choir sang from the North aisle huddled round one of the old black coke burning cast iron stoves. On Easter morning Miss Harper (nurse) would appear in our Vestry prior to matins bringing clean surplices which had so much starch in them that one had to force one's fist to separate the material of the sleeves. And it was back to red (double breasted) cassocks and into the Cathedral to sing Allelujah!

Other memorable occasions were when we sang an Oratorio for which we would be joined by soloists from London, the Exeter Choral Society and full Orchestra as well as the organ. The Cathedral would be absolutely packed. Many people would have to sit where they could hear but not see the performance.

Every year services would be held prior to the opening of the Assizes when the judges and members of the legal profession would attend in their robes. Always reminded me of Judge Jeffreys.

Another annual service was for the Senior Scholars (university students and sixth formers). They were always supposed to sing "God be in my head" unaccompanied but I never recall them actually doing so. Dr. Wilcock would play the introduction on the organ and that would be followed by silence. He would try again with the same lack of response. We were prepared and would hear "Psst" from the organ loft. "Baldy's" head would appear over the top of the screen signalling to us to sing. So, as usual, we filled the gap.

When I went to the Cathedral School in 1944 the Quire and Lady Chapel were out of use. There were being used to provide floor areas to remake those parts of the structure, screens organ etc which had been damaged by the bomb blast in 1942. Until these areas were



brought back into use all services were held in the Nave and the music was provided from a grand piano in the North Transept. What a wonderful day it was when all this changed. We were back in the Quire, the organ music filled the Cathedral, the service was attended by all the civic and church dignitaries and, most important of all, Mr. Reid, the architect responsible for the restoration. What a wonderful job he and stonemasons, carpenters and other craftsmen had achieved. Screens that had been broken into hundreds of pieces had been found amongst the rubble and put back together like a giant jigsaw puzzle. Twisted organ pipes had been straightened and were now making music. To be part of that re-awakening of the Cathedral was an experience it is impossible to describe.

Of course, not everything had been restored at this stage. The Bishop's throne had been removed earlier in the war and was re-installed later on. There was scaffolding in the South aisle and quite often on a Sunday those of us who had to go across to the Cathedral to prepare the music for evensong would climb the ladders up to the galleries from where we could make our way to the towers and the belfry. On more than one occasion Mr. Treneer came looking for us and we were physically chastised for our behaviour.

Before the arrival of Peter Green, the succentor, Mr Richards, the vicar of Crediton occasionally took services. He was a great contrast to "Reggie" Llewellyn. Tall and smart with jet black hair, military insignia on his scarf and a voice which was deep and resonant and boomed round the Cathedral. We liked it when he took a service and on more than one occasion the entire choir went to his church in Crediton when some special performance such as St. Matthews Passion was taking place.

Choristers were quite well paid for special services and often I would return to school with £1 pocket money for the term and return home



at the end of term with £2 or £3. The going rate in the late 40's was as follows:

Memorials, weddings and funerals	- 2/6
Oratorios	- 5/-
Broadcasts	- 10/-

In addition, the Dean and Chapter paid us 6/8 per term. Membership of a Cathedral Choir is an honour and privilege which only a few people can ever experience. To be involved in the centuries old tradition of English church music at the highest level with such a magnificent organ in the most beautiful of buildings cannot be described. Only those who have had the good fortune to sing in such circumstances can appreciate it. I still marvel to think that such a group of boys, aged from only 8 years old up to 13, can be taught and trained to such a high standard. I only hope that despite the present difficulties which some Cathedrals are experiencing in finding suitable candidates, that the wonderful tradition can be maintained. It would be a tragedy if it ever died out.

Gordon Pike reflects on a 50 year association with Exeter Cathedral School

Do you remember your first day at ECS? Yes, very clearly. It was 7th January 1963 and it was my first time away from home. It had snowed heavily on the previous evening so many roads around Exeter were impassable. My father wasn't going to be put off by the weather so his delivered me to school on his tractor. It was a Massey 35 and I sat on my tuck box in the link box clad in a heavy coat, scarf and had, wrapped up against the cold as we made our way to school. I was very tearful when it was time for him to go home but Matron did her best to console me as I listened to the tractor departing back down Palace Gate.



What did you wear for school in those days? Well, the school blazer was only worn in the Trinity term. We had a grey suit for Sundays, and at other times we wore shorts and long grey socks. I remember my legs were too big for the regulation shorts and so I was allowed to fashion my own by cutting the legs of a pair of long trousers just above the knee.

How many children were in the school in the early 1960s? Before I arrived the school had catered solely for the choristers but by 1963 there was a mixture of day boys and boarders, choristers and non-choristers. There were 20 choristers and six probationers and they made up just under half the total number of boys in the school.



Gordon, the boy Chorister



Was the day to day life of a chorister in 1963 very different from today? No, not really. There were many similarities in fact. We would get up at 7.15am, do some music practice and after breakfast at 8am we would have choir practice until 9.10am. There was an hour's practice after school before Evensong at 5.30pm. There were eight sung services a week (but only one set of choristers don't forget) and occasionally we would sing Mattins on a Wednesday morning. The big difference was Saturday morning lessons. We had choir practice from 9am until 10.30am then there would be lessons until lunch at 12.30pm. The day pupils were expected to come in for Saturday school. We followed a timetable very similar to today, although there was no IT, DT and FT. We did Latin and Greek and there was woodwork available on a Sunday. In the evenings there would be prep to complete just as there is today but there was no TV and often we filled our leisure time playing board games.

Can you remember much about the Games provision? Yes. We used to have cross-country running along the river by St. Loyes. I was often excused this as I suffered from chapped legs for most of the winter. I remember Matron would let the off-games boys stay back in the warmth of her surgery and give them Mars bars! Otherwise, just as today, we travelled up to the Exeter Cricket Club fields on Prince of Wales Road to play football and cricket. There were no minibuses in those days but we hired transport from Underhill's who ran the garage just next to school from the building that is presently 2 Deanery Place. Underhill's provided a fleet of Daimler taxis and we would be driven, six to a car, up to the fields by a chauffeur in livery!

What was the best moment of the school year? Christmas without a doubt. There was great festive spirit around the Close and the Christmas services were very special, just as they are today. We would sing the Grandisson Service on Christmas Eve and return to school for supper and an early night.



We were up at 6am on Christmas Day to serve at the early service in the Cathedral and after a hearty breakfast we would sing the two morning Christmas Day services. Lunch was a modest affair of boiled ham and potatoes and then there would be carols from the Minstrels' Gallery, the service that is enjoyed by many to this day. After this the fun began. We would have our Christmas supper at 5.30pm in school accompanied by the lay vicars and some of the clergy. This would be followed by "The Big Film" and we would all sit around the clicking projector for the evening's entertainment. No Christmas Day was complete without a visit from Santa. So the Headmaster would dress up as Father Christmas and distribute presents which we were allowed to open before retiring to bed. We were also required to sing on Boxing Day after which our singing duties would be over and we would be allowed to go home. I felt very lucky to be finishing on Boxing Day especially as many of my predecessors remember singing right through Christmas to Epiphany before being allowed home.

Gordon Pike, A Gentleman of the Choir: Rosemary Bethell

It was a privilege to talk with this gentle giant in my home. FIFTY YEARS! Starting as a boy chorister, then after his voice had broken and been reformed, becoming in 1974 a tenor choral scholar. After graduating at St Luke's College he was appointed as a teacher of Geography, Mathematics, History and Sports at Exeter Cathedral School in 1975.

How did he begin his life as a chorister? The Vicar, the Reverend Edwards (at Whitestone Church) who was also a teacher at the Cathedral School heard on a Christmas Eve Gordon sing as solo the hymn Once in Royal David's City. He was very impressed and suggested that he join the Cathedral Choir. Eventually Gordon became Head Chorister. This was during the time of Lionel Dakers.



The highlight for him during his chorister days was to sing the 'Hodie Nobis' responses right at the beginning of the Grandisson Service on Christmas Eve.

In due course he became one of the Lay Vicars and more recently the Punctator. Lucian Nethsingha was the Organist and Master of the Choristers, and Paul Morgan the Assistant Organist. This was a period of twenty-five years, where nothing less than the maintenance of very high standards was acceptable, achieved through precise instruction, and with a very firm discipline, especially in the earlier years, but which softened considerably during the latter ones. The Choir had a very distinctive sound.

Much hilarity was felt by members of the choir when Gordon fell asleep during a sermon. The hymn started and he remained seated. 'I need to see you in the inner sanctum!' For a while, there were 'no speakies' from Lucian!

'Now we have Andrew Millington as our Musical Director, David Davies as the Organist, and Stephen Tanner, who is responsible for music in the School, as well as being the Director of the girl choristers. All of them are brilliant! We now sing a more versatile repertoire.'

The routines have changed recently in that the boy and girl choristers sing on alternate weekends, excepting special festivals. The Gentlemen of the Choir rehearse with them before the Sunday services. This has made life much easier for the gentlemen, in that they can continue doing other work and sing with other choirs. Gordon loves the daily singing of Evensong:

'It is a therapeutic experience between work and home. There are good feelings within the choir. We pull together and we like what we do.'



Gordon has been on every Choir Tour since 1981, visiting Austria, Cyprus, Germany, Holland, Italy, Newfoundland, Norway, Russia, Switzerland, and the USA.

'The choristers get very excited as it is often the first time they have been abroad, or away from home without their parents.'

'They gain a great deal from the experience. It is a kind of reward for all that they do at the Cathedral.'

This year, they went to Vienna. Whilst waiting at Heathrow for their flight, there was a piano near to where they were seated. One of the choral scholars started to play the Moonlight Sonata. Others joined in! Guess who? They loved Vienna; the beauty of the architecture in the buildings and the churches. They sang in the UN building, where they were given a tour, and a splendid lunch. This architecture and the history affected their music making, singing in places where famous composers had had their works first performed.

'I'll never forget Edward Berry in Lugano Cathedral. A lot of the boys were sick, and he had to sing the treble solo. It left the place in amazement. Edward remarked, afterwards, that it was the last time he would sing treble. The next day his voice had gone!'

There is [Gordon admits] sometimes the wee problem of going wrong when singing a solo, and desperately trying to find your way back to the right place! It is known as *'The Indian Love Song!'*

Bach solos and Gordon do not agree too happily, but he particularly loves Edgar Day's composition When I Survey the Wondrous Cross. *'It is out of this world!'* His first love for a tenor solo though is Basil Harwood's Magnificat in A flat.



If you had a magic wand, what would he wish for in the Cathedral?

'I'd like the Cathedral to settle down and not be quite so busy that we lose its primary function as a place of worship, and a place that really cares about people. There are so many people needing help. When I was at a very low ebb, I used to just sit in the Cathedral, and especially, to be able to sing with the choir, was a great therapy.

On a really personal note, *'I'd like to start to get younger, so that I could go on singing forever!'* Wouldn't we all?

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