

**ECOCA  
Newsletter**

***February 2015***



**EXETER CATHEDRAL**

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Dear Members,

Welcome to the ECOCA Newsletter February 2015. This is the fifth edition I have put together, and the first time I have made a contribution myself. This year is another important one for ECOCA as Exeter hosts the annual festival of the Federation of Cathedral Old Choristers' Associations from 3rd July to 5th July 2015.

As ever, I would be very happy to receive any news or contributions for future editions. We are now sending out the newsletter in both electronic and paper format, and so I have slightly changed the style as I have mastered Microsoft Publisher ! Please feel free to contact me at anytime with your news or ideas:

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# ECOCA at 50!

Geoffrey Mitchell (1944-50)



A Golden Jubilee is indeed something to celebrate, and those of you who joined us on Easter Monday will, I am sure, feel that we did so in great style?

Records show that there was some sort of Association back at the beginning of the last century, for there are reports of Old Chorister dinners in the early 1900s. But I presume the other major event being commemorated this year may well have put paid to such activities? I wonder how many old choristers of Exeter returned from that dreadful carnage? My own chorister days began during another World War, thirty years on, when my parents wished to get me out of the London blitz and the air-raids. There was talk even then by Mr Treneer of forming an Old Choristers' Association, but it was not until the combined genius of Dean Marcus Knight, Organist Lionel Dakers and HM Tom Evans that such an idea came to fruition in 1964.

This year, because of scaffolding in the Quire due to the current work on the organ and the strengthening of the pulpitum, for the first time ever services were held in the Nave. At first I for one was disappointed at the prospect, but in the event the singing was wonderfully amplified and projected by the choir's position on a raised platform at the head of the Nave, and was truly magnificent. Schubert's Mass in G was beautifully sung, and I can't ever remember Wood's "O thou the central orb" at the Communion sounding so thrilling. What was particularly fitting and moving – and a great privilege – was the presence in the altar party of our two ordained members – Charles Roberts and John Pedlar, the Celebrant being The Precentor Carl Turner

who has done so much to support us, and has provided constant help and encouragement over this particular re-union



Likewise Evensong with its two great war-horses Wood in E flat No 2 and Wesley's "Ascribe" were simply stupendous. Thanks are due to all who took part – from the Director downwards! (The *Gloria* of the *Magnificat* was a little weakened by the absence of Gordon Pike who had made his way to the lectern for his reading of the second lesson, but all was restored for the *Nunc dimittis*!)

Tea in the Chapter House was, as usual, probably the highest-attended event of the day, and it was delightful to see amongst others Lucian Nethsingha back with us – a stranger for far too long!

Evensong was followed by a champagne reception back in the Chapter House, courtesy of our Chairman and our Treasurer – Charles Roberts and Gordon Pike, who donated the nectar in honour and memory of their mothers who had both died during the year. A wonderful gesture.

The dinner was held at the Rougemont (Thistle) Hotel, with drinks at 7.30 and the meal at 8. Our Guest of Honour was Christopher Gower, as ever his infectiously charming and amusing self. The great joy was that he had been at that first Re-Union in 1964, in his capacity as Assistant Organist. He described the Close and its inhabitants in that year, as well as reminding us all of the vicissitudes of life still prevailing after the war which assailed us all. But he kept it mostly light-hearted and was hugely welcomed and applauded.



I was honoured to respond to his toast to our Association, and took the opportunity to remind the assembly of the importance of its existence and what we must do to preserve our treasured tradition.

I drew attention to the others present who had also been there in 1964 – The Reverend John Pedlar (then still at University, and his brother Nicholas, up from Queen's, Taunton). They have both been regular attendees over the years – Nick being our first Chairman after the transition from the Headmaster's automatic chairmanship. He set a testing and demanding agenda then, which has seen us in good heart ever since.

Others who were celebrating their presence at that occasion was Barry Sharp, and of course our two stalwart ex-choristers from the time – Gordon and Charles. (Oh yes – I was also there in 1964, and have missed only one in all the fifty years!).

I reminded the company of the importance of being a chorister. I called to mind the death of a recent Chairman Bob Norman - a contemporary of mine – at whose funeral in Reading Minster the service paper displayed on the front cover just a photograph of him in his chorister's robes and mortarboard. Despite a successful career in the world of banking, it was his chorister-ship that most delighted him, and defined the man.

I then spoke of others for who have claimed that this has been a significant mile-post in their careers: the recent Captain of the English cricket team, famous actors such as Simon Russell Beale, cathedral organists – too many to mention – and famous conductors such as Sir Mark Elder, Sir Andrew Davies and Edward Gardner - all of whom speak publicly about the importance and influence their days in the choir stalls had on their subsequent lives.



I also took the liberty of mentioning our newest committee member – Johnny Titchin, simply because he has recently been a lay-clerk at Llandaff Cathedral, whose Dean and Chapter summarily dismissed the whole choir just before Christmas due to lack of funding. (This after spending £1.5m on a new organ earlier in the year, though what use it's going to be to them without the mainstay of their music I cannot imagine.)

I reminded everyone that there are other cathedrals pleading poverty and the proposed abandonment of their choirs – Ripon, Sheffield and possibly even Lincoln. I congratulated our own D&C on their enlightenment to recognise and value what we and our predecessors have done for the benefit of all congregations. I drew our attention to the enormous financial help we as an association give to the cathedral in support of the school and the choir, and encouraged everyone to devote our energies to continuing to preserve this heritage.

*Floreat ECOCA!*

# Cathedral Choir Tour

Andrew Millington, Director of Music



On Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> July 2014 the boys and men of the Cathedral Choir set out for a four day tour of East Anglia. The party consisted of 17 boys, 11 men (including the Headmaster) organist, director and four staff to look after the boys. Canon and Mrs Turner were with the choir for the last time before the move to New York, Paul and Mandy Bennett completed the team. The choristers were in very capable and caring hands.

After a considerable coach journey on the first day, the choir arrived at Long Melford, Suffolk for a concert in one of the finest of the famous perpendicular churches of that area. This was followed by a further journey to the outskirts of Norwich, where the choir was accommodated in the spacious setting of Wymondham College. The following morning took us to the small village of Narborough where the choir sang at the Eucharist in All Saints' Church. This is just a few miles from Castle Acre, home of Jonathan Meyrick and family, our former Dean and now Bishop of Lynn.



Jonathan and Rebecca hosted a wonderful lunch in their lovely garden, only curtailed by a sudden deluge and a mad dash indoors ! Jonathan drove down from the Synod in York especially to be with us !



After lunch we set out for Wymondham for Evensong and a short recital in the magnificent Abbey. This is a very fine building, if just the nave of the original medieval monastic church. The organ and choir were at opposite extremes of the building, but David Davies gave his usual impeccable accompaniment, unfazed by the distance. The choir returned to the College, and the gentlemen settled down to watch the World Cup Final with some suitable liquid refreshment.

The first two days were rather punishing and non-stop, so a free Monday morning was welcome. Some of the party had a trip to Norwich to look around the Cathedral or visit the shops. In the afternoon we set out for Southwold, for a breath of sea air, mixed with the very pleasant aroma of hops and yeast coming from the Adnams' Brewery in the centre of the town.

Another short journey took us to the beautiful church of Blythburgh for the evening concert. This church has many associations with the music of Benjamin Britten, and the performance was warmly received by a large audience.

On Tuesday morning, everything was packed up for the journey home via Ely Cathedral. We spent most of the day there, singing a lunchtime concert in the stunning Lady Chapel, and Evensong in the Quire.



We arrived back in Exeter just before midnight, tired but with happy memories of a worthwhile and interesting trip.



The choir sang extremely well, and I was particularly impressed with the younger choristers who delivered the goods despite the absence of some strong senior boys whose voices gave out before the tour. This should bode well for next year.

After a spectacular and costly tour to Vienna last year, we are having tours on a small scale for two years before something more extensive in 2016. The East Anglia Tour was the idea of Mrs Muff Dudgeon, a great supporter of the Cathedral and the choir, and she worked tirelessly on our behalf to make it all happen.



# FCOCA Festival 2015



Preparations are now well under way for the annual festival of the Federation of Cathedral Old Choristers' Associations, which will be held in Exeter from 3rd July to 5th July 2015.

We have made arrangements with the Rougemont Hotel (Thistle Exeter) for accommodation on Friday 3rd July at £109 per night bed and breakfast (£130 double occupancy) and on Saturday 4th July at £89.00 per night bed and breakfast (£99 double occupancy).

The cost of a ticket for the festival is £70 for both Friday and Saturday, or £60 for Saturday alone. The full cost ticket includes a civic reception and buffet meal at the Rougemont Hotel on the Friday night, as well as the festival banquet on Saturday night.

The weekend includes the festival evensong on Saturday 4th July, where old choristers from around the country will join the Cathedral Choir, singing Stanford in C, SS Wesley *Ascribe unto the Lord*.

The festival organizing committee hope that as many ECOCA members will attend as possible, both as participants and as volunteers. The festival will be on the agenda for our Annual General Meeting on Easter Monday. The programme of events can be found on the next two pages.

# Federation Festival 2015 Programme

## Friday 3rd July

- 1pm Delegates Arrival and Registration at Rougemont Hotel, Queen Street, Exeter EX4 3SP
- 5.30pm Choral Evensong (Cathedral Choir)
- 6.30pm Civic Reception (Chapter House)
- 8pm Buffet Meal, Derby Room, Rougemont
- 9pm Informal Evening. Bar open until 12am



# Federation Festival 2015 Programme

## Saturday 4th July

- 8am Morning Prayer and Holy Communion in the Cathedral
- 10am Optional Tours of the Cathedral and City
- to 1pm
- 1pm Lunch arranged by delegates around Cathedral Close or City Centre
- 3pm Rehearsal for Festival Evensong (Stanford in C, SS Wesley *Ascribe unto the Lord*)
- 4pm Festival Evensong (Cathedral Choir and OC's)
- 4.45pm Tea in Chapter House
- 5.30pm Organ Recital in the Cathedral
- 7pm Drinks Reception, Cavendish Suite, Rougemont
- 8pm Festival Banquet, Devonshire Suite, Rougemont

## Sunday 5th July

- 10am Sung Eucharist
- 11.15am Coffee in Chapter House (with congregation)
- 12pm End of Festival

# Roland Dawson-Bowling

## 1945 – 2012



Barry Ferguson. Chorister 1951—1956.

I read in today's Church Times: "seeing someone change the world – even on a relatively small scale – is a truly inspiring thing".

Roland James Dawson-Bowling (2.8.1945 – 31.1.2012) was a fellow chorister in the 1950's in Reg Moore's musical era. Roland was not the conventional middle class child. The last (and final) time I met him was sitting together at a meal in Exeter during Reg's 2010 centenary gathering. I immediately recognised his gentleness and his vulnerability. We discussed many things, including the composer Charles Steggall, who hymn tunes I promised to send Roland – since he was clearly intrigued to find a gap in his own knowledge! But I did not have an overall picture of Roland's life until his funeral on 23<sup>rd</sup> February in Faversham's wonderful parish church. It was good that Reg's daughter Christine Ford sat in the pew with my wife Sandi and me.

The tributes by Roland's nephews were profoundly revealing. After studying singing at music college, Roland decided not to pursue it as a career but to go into business administration instead. Clearly he was a much loved uncle. He was "his own man", certainly; a lover of church music who had relished his Exeter Cathedral days – an experience that shaped his Christian thinking and belief, his tastes, his actions, his concern for the less fortunate, his love of the important things in life, and his (eccentric) efforts to ignore other things – such as his morning post, which he left unopened for years, including, perhaps,

for the less fortunate, his love of the important things in life, and his (eccentric) efforts to ignore other things – such as his morning post, which he left unopened for years, including, perhaps, my Steggall letter!



Roland changed and warmed people's lives. His active concern for others was a wake-up call to us all in Faversham Church. This memorable service, with its superb singing by a professional octet, vibrant hymn-singing and organ-playing, moving sermon and unexpected sunshine may well have changed more lives that day, too.

At a time when prayers before council meetings are being questioned, the powerful but quiet story of Roland's pursuit of a Christian life of integrity in thought, word and deed reassured us of our country's Christian roots and values. "Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go" we sang "my daily labour to pursue." It seemed to ring true. Deo gratias.

## **Confessions of an 80's Chorister**

Matthew Ryan (1983—1987)

In September 2014 ECOCA Secretary Charlie Rendell sent me a reminder of an early contribution I made to a newsletter, republished here for posterity. Alongside chorister Ben Shaw I co-authored a pithy account of a Sunday outing to Halden Forest, submitted to the November 1983 edition of the Exeter Cathedral School newsletter. It was evident even as a probationer that I was destined for great things in newsletters with a limited but distinguished readership.



talking about? Don't you mean a stick up?' 'No' said the robber 'I forgot my gun'.

Nicholas Padget 4a

### A Choristers and Probationers Outing Haldon Forest

When we got there we had to drive through a great clearing. We decided to stop where a few cars were parked. Matthew Ryan and Charles Rendell made a den; all the rest of us went for a jog. We decided to have an indian peace smoke so Mr. Baird got a stock and he passed it around. We went to find an obelisk. We saw a place called Obelisk Garden and we said that mustn't be it. We saw a broken-down car with a lady in it. She said 'It's all right the A.A. is coming'. We had a rest then we ran as fast as we could down a path to the bus.

ey,

B.Shaw, M.Ryan

### Swimming

It was 4 p.m. Thursday. Who should come skidding around the corner but the one and only, my mum, with my er little sister in the front. We piled



It got me thinking about the accounts of chorister life I had edited in previous editions of the ECOCA newsletter, from Andrew Moseley in the 1930's, through Geoffrey Mitchell and John Lomax in the 40's and 50's, to the memories of our Chairman Charles Roberts in the 1960's. It struck me just how little chorister life had changed in the fifty years prior to my arrival at The Chantry in September 1983. I reflected that now was the time to add my own recollections to this fine tradition, carefully editing the narrative to give my own account of historical events.



For I do have a slightly undeserved reputation amongst some of my contemporaries for always being at the centre of any misdemeanours, but out of sight when staff inevitably intervened to keep us in check. I prefer to regard this ability as an early appreciation one of life's golden rules: "don't get caught". As nearly thirty years have elapsed since these events, I think the statute of limitations enables me to make one or two confessions to set the record straight.

Life as a probationer in The Chantry in the early 1980's was a heady mix of chorister training with Paul Morgan, football in the playground, learning an instrument, more football, times tables, and ravioli. Our evening meals were prepared by Mrs Hortop, affectionately known to the boys as "Haggie". Mrs Hortop's culinary repertoire was not extensive. Although food rationing ended in 1954, it seemed that no one had let Mrs. Hortop in on this. I do, however, have an abiding love of eggy bread, which can only be attributed to this period.

I recall being quite an agile young boy, quick to climb when the football went over the playground wall, and with a genuine talent for evading opponents in games of tag. I remember on one occasion Keith Burt showing a prospective parent around the school, inviting them to view the common room, just I jumped out of it's first floor window. I don't think Mr Burt was too impressed with this, or my uncomprehending explanation of the importance of *not being caught*.



Another popular game of this era, particularly after lights out, was "chariots". This involved two or more boys dragging another boy sitting on his duvet along the corridors and down The Chantry stairs. Clearly the Latin lessons provided by Mr Fisher had not gone to waste. This game was particularly risky on the top floor, where the race course passed the accommodation of the resident staff. Here there was a 90 degree left handed turn between the Vaughan Williams and Elgar dormitories, and the charioteer risked slamming into the door on the corner, if the staff member had not already been awoken by the stampede outside their room.

I believe I may have been involved in an unsuccessful run on one occasion, leaving the charioteer sitting dazed on his duvet outside the room of Miss Smith. Following the golden rule articulated above, I used the classic "feigning ignorance" strategy, and was uncommonly difficult to wake from my bed when Mr Burt came looking for those responsible. I avoided the punishment given to the majority of the dormitory, which I confess was unjust. There were other occasions, however, when it was impossible to avoid the consequences of my misdeeds.

Our daily routine included practice of our instruments, sometimes at lunch time in Kalendar Hall. I think it's fair to say I never came close to reaching the 10,000 hours required to master the violin. Part of the problem, I'm afraid, was the freedom afforded by individual practice away from direct supervision, and the wealth of opportunities to misbehave.



I recall being very curious about the fire extinguisher in Kalendar Hall, and particularly interested in whether it could be used in short bursts, or discharged in one long stream of water. This curiosity combined with the opportunity of a practical joke on one of my mates. I can confirm that the fire extinguisher discharged in one long stream of water, and the joke was on me as I ran around Kalendar Hall in blind panic trying to hide the evidence.

I was, of course, not the only malefactor of Kalendar Hall in the 1980s. The piano used by Mr Nethsingha during my voice trial had wheels, a fact that was not lost on those struggling to maintain interest in practicing their instruments. One of our favourite ways to pass the time was to collectively push the piano, like a bob sleigh, jump on board and ride it up and down the hall.

On one occasion, towards the end of my time as a chorister, when I should have known better, we came to grief. Like a bob sleigh, a piano that has built up momentum is not an easy beast to control, or to stop. I recall a group of us riding the piano and collectively coming to a realisation that we had left it too late. We leapt off and tried in vain to minimise the impact.

The piano came to rest protruding one or two inches through the window. Fortunately for us the window was made of toughened glass and did not shatter into a thousand pieces. It is possible that we didn't own up to this offence, given the proximity of leaving the Cathedral Choir in 1987. If this is the case, then I will keep my counsel regarding my fellow miscreants, but you know who you are...



There is, of course, so much more I could write about my memories as a chorister at Exeter Cathedral and life at the Cathedral School. It was an experience that clearly shaped my life and give me opportunities that I would not otherwise have had. I continue to benefit from the musical education, and singing is an integral part of my life. The violin continues to gather dust on top of the wardrobe.

