

**ECOCA  
Newsletter**

**February 2016**



**EXETER CATHEDRAL**

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Dear Members,

Welcome to the ECOCA Newsletter February 2016. It has been a year of change and new beginnings for the Cathedral Choir and Exeter Cathedral School.

Our reunion this Easter Monday can also reflect back with some pride on our very successful hosting of 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. Please feel free to contact me at anytime with your news or ideas:

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# Gordon Pike retires from Exeter Cathedral School



Mr N P Bagnall

“Is that teacher still there? You know the one – the one that commentates on the game as he referees, the one who sings, big chap with a beard ... so generous, the children love him ...” How many times have these questions been asked?



Many are the times that young men have observed Gordon tirelessly shepherding small young boys and girls on to minibuses outside the Chantry and have been heard to say “There he is, Mr Pike, he’s the one.” Mr Pike, the inestimable, sensitive responsive soul who like one of Christ’s faithful has cared for generations of children.

Almost thirty years ago when boarders at the Cathedral School chose staff mentors, Gordon Pike was the overwhelming favourite with the children. No small wonder, a boyish man who children trust. A faithful teacher who parents feel they can confide in. “His nan’s really not well but he still wanted to play in the match...” Gordon with a knowing nod would reply “That’s ok, I’ll buy him a bun and we’ll have a chat.”

Steal a glance into Mr Pike's office and you immediately know he's the Cathedral School's "Mr Fix it" – countless pairs of boots, replacement studs, games shirts, shin pads, rugby balls and spare swimming trunks adorn his desk. He can circumvent the intransigence of the city council to secure a venue for a match when all other attempts to find a pitch have. He can coax a performance out of the most unwilling of sportsmen and delights in encouraging teams to aspire to their very best in inter-school competition.



His allegiance to ECS has been unstinting. As a form teacher, Gordon always had the welfare of his charges at heart. Countless year groups benefited from his Maths and History teaching and many a year 5 child has been inspired by his enthusiasm for medieval history, especially having enjoyed Gordon's tour of Totnes Castle or his re-enactment of the Battle of Hastings on the Cathedral Close.

He remains a profound friend to colleagues in need and tireless in his service. He has known the relentless demands of a vibrant school and has sometimes sacrificed his own needs at a cost. Gordon, a tenor with so rich a voice has embodied ECS's motto 'Ut Voce, Ita Vita'; as with our voices so with our lives for the fifty-three years man and boy.

Many images come to the fore as I think back over the time I have known Gordon. The most enduring was of him striding through the deep waters of a quarry in the Malvern Hills, St Christopher-like, with a boy on his shoulder having rescued him from the side of the gorge after he had got stuck. "Leave it with me," Gordon has selflessly said, probably thousands of times.

It reassured us to know that he would help address our problems. For years, he would stay late at night, making sure all the buses were filled with petrol. He would ensure a winning team was taken out for pizza, carless teachers ferried home.



The pages of his untold generosity could go on and on. So perhaps it's best to remember him in a performance so true to life that he made many of us cry. Gordon, the gentle giant, some days larger than life, selflessly caring at ECS as he acted with the year 4 children in Oscar Wilde's "The Selfish Giant" back in 2005:

"And the child smiled on the Giant and said to him 'You let me play once in your garden, today you shall come with me to my garden, which is Paradise.'"

Gordon has helped to create a bit of paradise for many children at ECS over the years. We wish him a vital retirement with Penny, his children and grandchildren and friends along with continued joy with his singing in the Cathedral.

## **FCOCA Festival** Geoffrey Mitchell

Only those people who have previously partaken in running an FCOCA Festival will have any idea of the amount of work involved – planning dates and liaising with the Cathedral and the Civic Authorities, finding and paying deposits on hotels, total costing of every event and meal, publicity, and preparing the advertising material for the Federation annual publication *Once A Chorister*.

A year or so later one hopes that punters from around the country will come out of the woodwork to make one's efforts worthwhile.



Having formed our Festival Committee three years ago, we were not entirely blessed with the fact that we lost three quarters of that four-man committee within three months! The Chairman, the Secretary and the Treasurer all had perfectly valid reasons to feel obliged to withdraw, leaving the fourth and least experienced (it has to be said) to take up the reins. But my goodness, what a fantastic job Simon Swan made of it!

He quickly recruited two of our young members, both happily and luckily on the Cathedral planning staff, Jonny Titchin and Cressida Weeks to pick up the cudgels. An inspired thought was to ask Dominic Asater who had been Treasurer for our previous festival in 1999 to take up that post again and a huge success that was too.

So, all in all, from what had looked like a disastrous start, eighteen months of strenuous and devoted work from that committee ensured that we had a huge success last July. The printed material was all set and published by our own publications man Matthew Ryan, and all was secure.

A slight panic was avoided after Andrew Millington had announced his intention to retire last Easter, but was hastily persuaded - slightly against his will! – to stay on and direct the music for us, for which he had had previous experience at Guildford twenty years before!



We finally fielded over ninety delegates from twenty-two Associations, although it is sad that we didn't see too many of our own younger members.



The letters of appreciation received afterwards confirm that everything was done according to traditional standards – alas not always achieved elsewhere – some saying: “that is how a proper festival ought to be run”!



Photo Roger Vaughan © [www.kentpixs.co.uk](http://www.kentpixs.co.uk) 140927-008

The venue for the whole event was The Rougemont Hotel, which meant that everyone was staying in the same place making social contact easy and hugely enjoyable; the meals were all there as well as the champagne Reception and Banquet on the Saturday too.

The hotel staff were utterly fantastic in the help they gave throughout the weekend, typing lists, making seating arrangements work for us, providing PA systems and generally making our lives more agreeable.



Musically we gave them a Wesleyfest (thanks to Andrew's inspired choices): Wesley in E for the Friday Evensong, and "Ascribe" as the anthem for the whole Federation choir to sing on the Saturday. The newly-restored Cathedral organ was displayed to its full. Mulet's *Tu es Petra* concluding Friday's service and the Fugue from the gargantuan Reubke Sonata on the Saturday. Andrew then gave us a Recital after Evensong, consisting of Howells, Gibbons, Bach, Elgar, Bourgeois and César Franck.

After Friday's Evensong we enjoyed a champagne reception given by the Lord Mayor in the Chapter House (the historic Guildhall, alas, not being large enough for such a gathering). Saturday's Banquet was particularly enjoyable, consisting of Wild Mushroom soup, Chicken with wild mushroom fricassée, followed by apple and toffee millefeuille. Our guest speaker was our old friend Christopher Gower, on his usual hilarious form. This was particularly apt as he had spent the larger part of his career as Director of Music at Peterborough, where the Federation had been founded in 1910.

The weekend was capped on the Sunday afternoon by a huge celebration for Andrew Millington's retirement, attended by many of our own Old Choristers.

A weekend to remember, with congratulations to all those who helped make it such a success.



# Reflections of former Director of Music Andrew Millington



At the end of 16 very happy and rewarding years as Director of Music at the Cathedral, I am pleased to have the opportunity to share a few thoughts and reflections. The core activity of my job has been the daily rehearsals and services with the Cathedral Choir, and in particular the training of the choristers. It is an extraordinary experience for a child who arrives at about aged 8 and is plunged into singing the great sacred works from all musical periods.



For a while the young choristers quietly absorb the music and develop basic musical skills. Then a gradual confidence and assurance emerges and they become fluent and professional in their singing, able to hold their own in any adult company. To enable and encourage this progression is probably the most satisfying aspect of my work, and I have seen several generations of choristers blossom as musicians and people through my time at Exeter. Some go on to become professional musicians, but either way, their chorister background gives them many important life skills and exposure to great art, architecture, and spirituality.

Over 16 years I have worked with four head-masters, all of who have had a passion for music and have supported the chorister cause unreservedly. I have valued this enormously.



Latterly, I have enjoyed an excellent working relationship with Mr Yeo and his enthusiasm for Cathedral Music has been evident in his willingness to sing with the choir so regularly.

Apart from the daily round, there have been many memorable special occasions over the past 16 years; royal visits, bishops' enthronements, concerts, and of course the rather unique Grandisson service on Christmas Eve. The choir has travelled the world on tour, including visits to Russia, USA, Norway, France, Holland, Italy and Tenerife. Tales and anecdotes from tours are numerous, but I will never forget Mr Pike singing 'Nessun Dorma' at the top of his voice in a karaoke bar in Yaroslavl on the banks of the Volga, much to the astonishment of the Russian locals!

Over the years, the choir has made many noticeable CD recordings and regular broadcasts for the BBC, which have raised the profile of Exeter and Cathedral music in general. I have been very fortunate in have highly skilled and dedicated musical colleagues at the Cathedral. Paul Morgan gave 40 years distinguished service to the Cathedral, and Stephen Tanner has directed the girls choir with great commitment since its inception in 1994. David Davies joined us 5 years ago, and his musical skills have a wide circle of admiration. It has been a matter of some pride that the Cathedral Outreach Project has now been running for several years since its inception in 2007, giving singing experiences to children across the county. As part of this scheme, the Devon County Junior Choir is gong from strength to strength under the direction of Rachel Smith.

I have enjoyed close links with the Cathedral School and I have always been made to feel very welcome by all concerned, be it teachers, secretaries, boarding, catering or maintenance staff.



I would like to make special mention of Lucy Lewis, who has been such a great support over the years in the considerable tasks of organising Chorister Open Day and Voice Trials.

Finally, back to the choristers. The distinctive and unique feature of the English Cathedral tradition is the daily performance of high quality music at services sung by children aged 8 to 13. This would not be possible without the unfailing support of their parents and Exeter has been very fortunate in the unflagging endeavour of parents / families over the years who enable their chorister children to take their part in the priceless heritage of our wonderful tradition.

I have been overwhelmed by the warmth and goodwill shown to me at various farewell events, in particular a very touching book of comments and good wishes from the choristers. The most memorable and entertaining remark must be this one: 'You are the best choirmaster I have ever had, even though I've only had one.' – open to interpretation but I will take it as a compliment.

I depart with a host of wonderful memories and a sense of deep gratitude to all. Exeter Cathedral music will go from strength to strength in the future and I wish everyone well for the coming years.

# Introducing Tim Noon, new Director of Music



Since becoming a chorister at the age of 8, new Director of Music Timothy Noon has worked as an organist and conductor in Cathedrals big and small, old and new, in England, Ireland, Wales, and New Zealand.

Tim says "I have wanted the top job in one of England's famous Cathedrals since I was 11 years old, and coming to Exeter is the fulfilment of that dream. I am really looking forward to making marvellous music with the team here!"

When not marching around the Cathedral Close in his Dr Who scarf, Timothy says he likes to play badminton and go for long walks, then undoing all the good work by eating too much of his own cooking!

# Installation of new Choristers and Headmaster



On

Sunday 10 January, during a special Evensong in the Cathedral, six pupils were formally installed as Choristers in the Cathedral Choir.

Congratulations to Jack Arnold, Theo Daniell-Greenhalgh, Thomas Coldrick, Izzy Kingsbury, Isabelle Morris and Arianwen Ramruttun.

Jack Arnold commented: "I felt special and excited and now feel proud and a proper chorister because of my surplus."





Ari-anwen said “I had an amazing time at my installation on Sunday. I had been excited all day! We sang the most perfect pieces with the boys during the Evensong, and I felt so proud to be part of the choir. I was extremely nervous when I was putting my tabard on and when I was waiting to be taken to my seat by Eleanor and Stephanie. I will remember that special day for the rest of my life. I am so happy to be a chorister and have been made so welcome by the other choristers. It is my dream come true!”

During the same service, James Featherstone was installed as Headmaster of Exeter Cathedral School, and Timothy Noon as the Cathedral’s new Director of Music. It was a moving and memorable service, and we wish each of them every success and happiness in their new roles.



# Remembering Theo Saunders, former ECS Director of Music



The following is an excerpt of the sermon preached by Rev Dr Michael Kennedy at the funeral service for Mr Theo Saunders.

John 6:40 “For this is the will of my Father, that every one who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day”.



The Church of England, our sister church, Theo’s spiritual home until he came to Ireland in 2002, has a most helpful definition of the purpose of a funeral address in its Pastoral Offices; namely, that it is “to preach the Gospel in the context of the death of a particular person.” What I have found daunting, in the preparation of this address at Theo’s funeral is the problem of encapsulating in words such an exceptional human being.

We all have our memories of him, ranging, in my case, from his accompaniment of the combined choir of Armagh and that of the Chapel Royal when the Royal Maundy came to us and the Queen and Prince Philip were present, and the comment of a well informed person was that our choir was even better than that of the Chapel Royal. To the domestically based enjoyment of gatherings of his friends for what I called his “At Homes”; partly liturgical, partly musical at which there were singers and players and of course Theo himself, playing sometimes on his grand piano in that magnificent music room of his, and sometimes on his two manual organ which shared the space, together with all the people.

The tributes paid to him have been many and varied, reminding us of his extraordinary gift for making friends. I count it as a very great privilege to have been among those who have had his friendship since his coming to Armagh as Organist and Master of the Choristers in this Cathedral.



We have all, individually as well as collectively, been enriched through our experience of knowing him. And, of course, his rather eccentric ways were part of his personality and, I am sure, gave us both amusement and pleasure. Sometimes they had an ecclesiastical aspect, and I am sure he would not mind my mentioning one or two of them. There was his love of cats, for example. Did you know that when he had two of them, some years back, they acquired nick-names, and were known as the “Archbishop” and the “Dean”?! One never quite knew, when the conversation turned to matters ecclesiastical whether the reference was to the two-legged or the four-legged kind! Present company excepted, of course!

Then there was his, rather unexpected, enthusiasm for railways. This normally captivates members of the clergy, who may perhaps like the relative predictability of trains on the track to their own necessarily rather semi-organized and haphazard work-life arrangements. Theo must have fallen into the same category, although his interest in transport did not extend to his ever learning to drive. I could never understand how his mastery of co-ordination of hands and feet in playing the organ and in his superb performances at the piano could not translate into driving a car, but perhaps his mind was on other things!

Theo grew up in a clerical household, his father being a Church of England clergyman in Cornwall and then latterly a prison chaplain, in a house full of books. His musical talent showed very early and he grew up feasting on Anglican worship at its best, including of course, Anglican chant and also plainsong – which was and remained a great love of his.

His gifts led him after school in Taunton to Corpus Christi College, Oxford, where he read music and in due course to acquisition of his full range of qualifications including his F.R.C.O. His career included teaching in the Cathedral School in Exeter – he was a fully trained teacher who was gifted in training others in all matters musical – and other appointments, including that in Leicester where his parish church choir was reputed to be superior to that in the cathedral.



When the post of Organist and Master of the Choristers in Armagh came up he was predisposed towards a move to Ireland by a favourable experience of being with his father many years earlier in a locum in Kilkenny. I can well remember meeting him for the first time in the Dean's residence in the library, Herbie Cassidy being the then Dean, and he was brimming over with excitement and enthusiasm over his having been appointed.

I well remember one of our weekly Saturday morning services, when we have a hymn and sing the Benedictus to plainsong at the daily office, and a large group of African refugees came up from the Republic of Ireland on a church-organized day trip to Armagh. They all came in to where we were in the Lady Chapel, and so we added in, unaccompanied of course, several very familiar hymns and they sang with the kind of fervour one associates with African Christianity.

Afterwards Theo brought them down and gathered them in the chancel and started playing the organ, and they listened stunned by the beauty of what they were hearing. I remember there was a little girl, aged I suppose about six who drew up next to me shyly and said, "I like this big church!" I said, "So do I" and it was all Theo's doing!

May our very dear friend, Theo, rest in Christ on this day, and in the end, rise in glory. Amen

