

**ECOCA  
Newsletter**

**February 2017**



**EXETER CATHEDRAL**

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Dear Members,

Welcome to the ECOCA Newsletter February 2017. It has been another year of change for the Cathedral Choir and Exeter Cathedral School.

We reflect back in this issue on the huge contribution that Stephen Tanner made to the music in Exeter Cathedral and the Cathedral School. We also include an interview with David Webb published at the point of his debut with the English National Opera.

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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# Stephen Tanner Retires

**Rachael Smith**

**Charismatic, funky, exemplary, thoughtful:** just

some of the words which the choristers used to describe Stephen Tanner which formed an incredible poster presented to him at his Farewell Party on Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2016.

Stephen is a remarkable man whose influence on generations of Devon school children cannot be overestimated. Here are a few of my own words: hard working, committed, super-efficient and organised, not just musically but administratively too which, these days, is as much an essential tool for good musicians as playing the dots on the page!



I have had the privilege of working alongside Stephen at ECS for the past 9 years, but I have actually known him from when he first arrived as Director of Music in January 1987 and I was working at the school as a gap student. This was the start of a musical friendship and, much to the astonishment of the ECS children, he played the organ (and Mr Pike sang) at my wedding in 1991!

**Christopher Helyer, former Headmaster of ECS, writes :**

*When, in 1986, we were appointing a successor to the late, legendary Theo Saunders, as ECS Director of Music, the then chairman of governors, Dean Richard Eyre, and I were very much of one mind that auditions should be central to the appointment process.*

*Inevitably there were school musicians who were looking for a 'back door' to a Cathedral organ loft. However, four short-listed candidates duly arrived for the 'trial by buffet supper' the night before the auditions and interviews.*



*By the end of the evening, Stephen was not leading the field but the following day that all changed. The candidates were all asked to direct the school choir and the school orchestra. At his two auditions, in Kalendar Hall, Stephen shone and by the conclusion of the interviews all concerned were unanimous that Stephen was the musician for ECS. I have never had cause to regret that decision and when I reflect on 25 years as a Choir School head, I count the appointment of Stephen to ECS as one of the best that I ever made.*

*Early proof came when, following an Aneka Rice-type 'raid' by post-CE pupils on a Devonport Church of England Secondary School, which created a music room for the school, Stephen directed the first Charity Concert, which raised money to equip that room. The early SWT years also found the ECS choir and orchestra on tour to Lugano, in Switzerland. I was privileged to travel with the party as double-bass player and I saw, at first hand, the meticulous organisation and inspirational musicianship which made the tour such an outstanding success. The significant increase in senior school music awards, not only for choristers, was also another indicator of Stephen's gifts as a teacher.*

*In his early years at ECS Stephen was also active on the games field, particularly as a soccer coach (in the days when Coventry City was fashionable side!). One of his colleagues from that era, Bill Teeton, was so inspired by the readiness with which Stephen enabled music and sport to sit side by side that he was determined that his own children should be able to do the same, if they so wished. His son, 'Gus', an enthusiastic cricketer, rugby-player and cyclist, is now in his first year at the University of Cape Town, reading music, and furthermore, is a flautist in the South Africa Youth Orchestra.*

*When I heard, in Salisbury, in 1994, that Stephen was to lead the Cathedral's initiative to found a girls' choir, I had no doubt that it was a classic case of 'cometh the hour, cometh the man.' In fact it was with the greatest confidence that I directed a number of talented girl singers, who had just missed out at the Salisbury voice trials, to Exeter where they flourished and enjoyed hugely successful choristerships under Stephen's direction. The first 22 years of the Cathedral girls' choir is now a truly remarkable chapter in the history of Exeter Cathedral.*



**Devoted, patient, supportive, kind...** Upon his arrival at ECS Stephen immediately started to transform the music department at the school, bringing a more modern approach although still valuing the rigorous, academic foundation which remains to this day. Stephen established a full programme of musical ensembles which he adapted to reflect the musicians in the school at the time and set out to provide them with an incredible breadth of experience firmly establishing a yearly round of concerts and other events to ensure that the children received plenty of performing experience.

In 1994 Stephen was asked to become Director of the Girl Choristers as girls were introduced to both the Cathedral Choir and ECS. For the past 22 years he has trained the girl choristers alongside his role as Director of School Music. This commitment cannot be overestimated. Stephen has devoted himself to both school and Cathedral and constantly striven for the very highest of standards.

The next major development came in 2007 with the introduction of the Chorister Outreach Project. Working alongside our partners in the Devon Music Service, Stephen has formulated a hugely successful model of visiting County Learning Communities and working in the schools and then bringing them all to the Cathedral for a concert with the Cathedral Choristers and the Devon County Junior Choir. Over the last 9 years, virtually the entire County has been covered (100% will be achieved by the summer of 2017) and we know from our colleagues just how much Stephen's leadership has inspired schools to raise the bar in terms of music making and singing.

**Andrew Millington, Director of Music at the Cathedral 1999 – 2016 writes:**



*In addition to the richly deserved tributes to Stephen as an outstanding and inspirational Director of Music at ECS, I would like to acknowledge the very significant contribution he has made for over 20 years to the musical life of the Cathedral. In 1994 he was given the responsibility of directing the newly-formed girl choristers, and he has carried out this important duty with exceptional dedication, skill and enthusiasm. From its early beginnings, the girls' choir, under his guidance, has developed into a fully-fledged section of the choral foundation, taking its rightful share in major services, broadcasts, tours and concerts.*



*Through all of this, Stephen has never relented in his quest for high standards, and a cold Monday in February has been as important to him as a major, high-profile event. He has nurtured the talents of generations of girl choristers, many of who are making their way in the musical world, inspired by their experience in the Cathedral choir. The repertoire of the choir has been enriched by his many fine compositions and he has made his own distinctive contribution to the organ playing in the Cathedral. Stephen has been an important player in a pioneering era in Cathedral music, not only with the girl choristers, but in his splendid leadership of the Chorister Outreach Project. The termly concerts in the Cathedral have been very stirring under his direction, and his rare ability to communicate energy and enthusiasm to youngsters has been manifest to all. On a personal note, I would like to thank him for his unfailing loyalty and friendship as a colleague for some 16 years, and I know that both he and Shirley will be sorely missed by the school and Cathedral communities. We wish him well for the future in the knowledge that his place in the story of Exeter Cathedral's music is indelibly assured.*



## **Enthusiastic, comical, big-hearted, incredible..**

In more recent years, Stephen has encouraged the formation of the Guitar, Junior Woodwind and Percussion Ensembles, has led the hugely successful Ukelele Club and brings together some wonderful combinations of instruments for the House Music Ensembles. One of the things that ECS prides itself on is the way in which music is taught so as to be inclusive – all children, whether those with a natural instinct or those for whom music is a bit more of a mystery, are given exposure to a range of musical styles, opportunities and ensembles. Whilst obviously providing a musical education of the highest degree to choristers and other high achieving pupils, we strive to make sure that every child reaches his/her musical potential whilst fostering a love for music which will last a lifetime. Yes, Chris Martin (Coldplay) and David Webb (ENO) have passed through the school and taken their first musical steps via Stephen, but there are literally hundreds of other pupils whose lives have been musically touched by Stephen and have gone on into all areas of working life whilst continuing their passion for music at an amateur level – singing in choral societies, playing in bands and orchestras.



## **Anna Prowse, former Cathedral Girl Chorister 1994 – 1997 writes:**

*The end of this term at ECS marks 'last' performances and 'last' events that Stephen is either directing or attending. So it is with great fondness that I return to 'first' events and performances, both personally and for the girls' choir as a whole. I was lucky enough to be in the very first cohort of girl choristers at Exeter Cathedral back in September 1994, a fact I am still immensely proud of and one which sits at the very top of my current CV, fittingly, it seems to me, as I regard my chorister years as the founding place of my professional music career. I still remember my audition day at ECS and my very first walk over to Kalendar Hall where we auditioned. There were three other girls in the music room waiting and one by one we sang our pieces and did some aural tests. I remember Abi Coon (now Abi Marshall and mum or two) being in the same round as me and that of course was the first day that I met Stephen Tanner.*

*My first day at ECS, several months later, marked another first for the girls' choir; our first rehearsal together. We filed into the music room at Kalendar Hall and were each assigned a place to sit down and these became our places in the choir.*



*Those early days established the pattern of the choir for its future generations; seniors and juniors sitting side by side, morning rehearsals where we developed so much of our musical training and importantly a sense of teamwork, professionalism and responsibility that I have worked by ever since. We were so privileged to have the opportunity of developing these qualities through the profoundly beautiful and transcendent medium of music. Stephen's passion and drive for music was infectious and in turn we each developed a life-long love of music and singing. This in itself would be a wonderful legacy, but Stephen did so much more and has continued ever since. Over the course of the next few weeks and months we prepared for our first public performance: evensong.*



*I can only appreciate now just how much effort and energy was required of Stephen to get our choir up to scratch. We were in direct competition with a choir which had dominated the scene for hundreds of years. In the days leading up to our first evensong, the local newspapers and television crews appeared at the Cathedral to interview us. Much expectation surrounded this new girls' choir. For some, it was too unorthodox: a fractur-*

*ing of tradition; but fortunately for many, it was seen as a ground-breaking opportunity for girls, a step towards equality and today, quite possibly, Cathedral music's saving grace.*

*It took a man of enormous vision and willpower to found and steer such a controversial group and were it not for the commitment, enthusiasm and professionalism of Stephen Tanner, the girls' choir could not have survived and would not have become the leading musical voice of so many generations. To him we owe an enormous debt of gratitude, for his unending faith, boundless energy, sheer determination and unshakable dedication.*





*Over the next three years, the girls' choir went from strength to strength under the careful and profession leadership of Stephen. More firsts occurred: our first Eucharist and weekend services; first head and deputy chorister installations; first Christmas and Grandisson services; first Easter services; first choir tour; first CD recording – each better than the last. I had three wonderful years at ECS and my first two were spent as a weekly boarder where I got to know and love my fellow school mates. 22 years later we are still in contact, sharing news, going to each other's weddings, having babies and musing over memories of an utterly unique education. Those friendships, along with the musical training we each received from Stephen, are the most important legacy of my time at ECS.*

**Humble, caring, professional, awesome...** Stephen has dedicated his life's work to ECS and Exeter Cathedral. The school and countless former pupils will be forever indebted to him for all he has achieved. I am fortunate that he has also guided and advised me, supported me musically in so many ways, has been the most tremendous musical colleague and, above all, a friend. My husband and I also have personal reason to thank him as our son and two daughters, all former choristers, owe so much to Stephen and his teaching through their time at ECS and all three, whilst pursuing different (and non-musical) careers, still have music at the heart of their lives. Stephen's legacy will live on and although there will be a very large hole next term, we will endeavour to continue in the same vein to ensure that all the children of ECS have a full, rounded and enjoyable musical education.

**Rachel Smith** has is the mother of Matthew, Charlotte and Ellie Smith, who were all choristers at Exeter Cathedral between 2002 and 2012. Rachel has now left Exeter Cathedral School and has taken up a post teaching music at Maynard School.

# ECOCA Reunion

## Gordon Pike, Hon Treasurer



The Reunion this year just seemed to come and go as one special day in the life of Exeter Cathedral. The rehearsal for Eucharist was taken by Stephen Tanner and forty-one Old Choristers joined to sing Sanford in C and F. Neville Gibbings read the Epistle and our Chairman Reverend Charles Roberts did the intercessions and remembers some Old Choristers who were unable to attend owing to illness; Richard Fellowes, Andrew Hydon, John Atfield. He mentioned Tony Salter who had passed



away just a week before Easter and Theo Saunders who had been Head of Music at ECS and had struggled for some time with cancer.

After Eucharist the new Headmaster James Featherstone invited those attending lunch to drinks in his study. Some of us were a little reluctant to go because we were thinking about punishments we had received when we were Choristers. At this point Robert Harwood turned up with his whole family. He had quite a few stories to tell about why he received punishments from the staff and Headmaster. Twenty-three of us sat down for lunch in the Radford Room and some of the senior Choristers joined us and listened to our stories. It was great to see some of their reactions when Nick Pedlar mentioned having cold bathes in the morning to wake up. Lunch took quite a long time and before we knew it we were back in the Quire rehearsing for Evensong. This change of time has been a success for the present Choristers because it means they can get home straight after Evensong and not wait around for most of the afternoon. Thank you to the Dean and Chapter who have allowed us to change Evensong to an earlier time. After all it is a special occasion and it means the parents do not have to wait too long for their children.

This year we welcomed Mr Timothy Noon as our new Director of Music and he put us through our paces to make sure we could sing the Howells St Paul service and then Ye Choirs of New Jerusalem by Stanford. We knew this was a big sing for the



Mag and Nunc and I think we got away with it. There were one to two interesting moments but we all got to the end at the right time. Full praise goes to Mr Noon who gave us such a clear beat and kept us going. It was very exciting and loud. Maybe next year we will try something a little less taxing.

After the tea in the Chapter House the Annual General Meeting was held in the Pearson Room in the Cloisters. There is always plenty to discuss and this year was no exception. The future of the Wesley Fund was a major topic and it seems that now it will be incorporated into the Bursary Fund and be under the control of the Bursary Treasurer, Dominic Asater. There are things that need to be changed and I am sure the Committee will make the right decision and keep you informed. The new Headmaster gave us the latest information about the school and he does appreciate all the help we give to looking after Choristers. As always the Chairman produced a written report which we could digest at a later date.

I have to say the Treasurer thinks it is time to get the Accounts up to date. He did produce three years' worth of accounts at the meeting and after checking them through there were one to two errors. But since the meeting the Accounts for 2013, 2014, and 2015 have gone to audit and have been approved. There is a fighting chance that the Accounts for 2016 will be ready and audited before the AGM in 2017. As always the election of Officers and Committee took place with a few changes and Any Other Business was kept brief so that we all could get to St Olave's Hotel for the champagne reception which was kindly donated by John Thomas. Sixty-nine people sat down to a three-course meal which everyone seemed to enjoy and our guest speaker, Canon John Searle from our own Cathedral kept us very amused so that by the end of the evening some of us relaxed in the hotel bar and stayed rather late exchanging even more stories about what has happened over the years.

# Beating the Bounds

Charles Roberts, ECOCA Chair



“Beating the Bounds” was an ancient custom of

walking the boundaries of a parish, usually by the parish priest and a collection of parishioners, old and young. This was particularly important for the young who often took a bit of a beating from the Church Wardens so that they would remember where the



boundaries were, in the absence of any maps! Hence the expression ‘whipping boys’ I imagine. For some smaller parishes it might take a day, for the larger ones it might take a week, but whatever the size of the parish the idea was to confirm the boundaries, because sometimes landowners tried to nick a bit of parish for themselves(!), and to pray for each part of the parish and its people as the walk progressed.

Well, back in September my son-in-law and I did a modern version of ‘Bound Beating’ and I actually found it a sobering and moving experience. It happened to be the Somerset Churches Trust sponsored ‘Ride & Stride’ day, and a number of people generously sponsored us as we cycled to every church in my Group (seven in all!) on a three hour tour of the parishes. Sponsorship is a wonderful incentive for getting the job done, especially given that it was quite a wet day and the temptation to put it off was quite strong. As we stopped in each parish I was able to draw breath, say a little prayer for the church and its people, and realise why it is that I usually use the car to get from A to B.

Somerset may be famous for its beautiful rolling hills, but it also has some absolute shockers when it comes to steep inclines on a bike! And I don't just mean going down! Nevertheless I can reflect on a challenging morning, a sense of satisfaction that I was able to visit my 'patch' in one go, and contribute in a small way to a Trust which has been generous to us in the past. Our ancient churches (all mine bar one are Grade 1 listed) take a lot of care and upkeep, and while not all have a great choral tradition, nevertheless they are wonderful icons of the presence of God in our communities.



## Choir News

Timothy Noon has now been in post as Director of Music at Exeter Cathedral for one year. Timothy received his early music education as a chorister at Hereford Cathedral, England, later learning the organ with Dr Roy Massey. At the age of seventeen he was appointed Organ Scholar of Canterbury Cathedral, and the following year became Organ Scholar at Christ Church, Oxford where he also read for a degree in music.



In 1993 he became a Fellow of the Royal College of Organists, winning six prizes in the examination, including the coveted Limpus prize. On graduating with First Class Honours, Timothy was appointed sub-organist of St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin. He returned to Canterbury Cathedral as Assistant Organist in January 1997, subsequently becoming Organist and Master of the Choristers of St Davids Cathedral, then Director of Music at the Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King in Liverpool. He moved to New Zealand to be with his Kiwi wife Elizabeth, in 2011, accepting the position of Director of Music at Auckland Cathedral of the Holy Trinity.



Whilst in the country he immersed himself in the country's musical scene, working not only on a daily basis with the cathedral's three choirs, but by serving as a council member of Australia and New Zealand College of Organists, on the governing body of the New Zealand Choral Federation, and participating as organist in projects with Auckland's main orchestras.



Away from the Cathedral, he enjoys long walks and playing badminton, then undoing all the good work by eating too much of his own cooking.

## Forty Years of Service

John Turner (Bass) and Michael Dobson (Alto) are celebrating 40 years of singing in the Cathedral Choir from 1976 to 2016. The Dean and Chapter recognised their immense contribution by giving them a party after Evensong in the Sacristy on 5<sup>th</sup> February 2017.



# Introducing James Featherstone, Headmaster



James Featherstone has now been in post as the new headmaster Exeter Cathedral School for one year. James was previously Head of the Lower School at the Perse School in Cambridge, one of England's top performing independent schools. The previous headmaster Stephen Yeo left Exeter after four years to take up his new post leading Britain's elite music school, The Purcell School for Young Musicians.



After completing his degree in French and Spanish at Durham University, James studied for a PGCE and was a choral scholar at Durham Cathedral. He later joined the choir of Jesus College, Cambridge and became part of the professional quintet at St-John-at-Hampstead, London. James said: "Exeter Cathedral School's commitment to first-class pastoral care, academic endeavour, extra-curricular involvement and a world-class musical education, and its focus on really knowing each of its pupils as individuals, chimes entirely with my own values and approach, and I look forward enormously to building on the outstanding work of Stephen and Cathy Yeo." He and his wife Julia, who was Assistant Director of Music at the Stephen Perse Foundation in Cambridge and a singer, moved to Exeter with their two young children in January 2016.

# Remembering Greg Daxter

Heather Morgan



The Cathedral Community heard with great sadness of the death of Prebendary Greg Daxter on 10<sup>th</sup> October 2016. His funeral was in St. Paul's Church, Preston, Paignton (where he served his first curacy in 1968) on 21<sup>st</sup> October.

Greg was a priest-vicar of the Cathedral and also Chaplain of the Cathedral School from 1978 until his retirement in 2003. He also edited Cathedral News, at first alone, and later as leader of an editorial team. Greg was first and foremost a man of prayer; the late Bishop John Richards often observed that no matter how early he arrived in the Cathedral before daily Morning Prayer, he always found that Greg was there before him.

This quiet devotion was apparent in Greg's demeanour; kind, gentle, concerned for people, and with a wry sense of humour. It also showed in his fortitude, not least after a road traffic accident during his time here, in which he suffered very serious injuries. He was a friend and pastor to many, and was much loved and respected. He will be greatly missed. We send our sympathy, our love, and our prayers to Lorna, Claire and Jo.

## David Webb on his ENO Debut, being a Cathedral Chorister, and Charity Work

A graduate of the international opera course at the Royal College of Music, tenor David Webb was selected for the Harewood Artist Programme at English National Opera. It is under this scheme that he made his ENO debut in a new production of 'Tristan and Isolde', conducted by Edward Gardner, opening on 9th June 2016. He talked to Toby Deller for the *Askonas Holt* arts management agency before his debut.

**You're playing the part of the young sailor.  
That's appropriate for a boy from Plymouth.**



It is, yes, and they've given me Frederic in *Pirates of Penzance* at ENO next year too, it's as if they are only giving me sailing roles! I'm really looking forward to it, it's the perfect start to being a Harewood Artist. It's a sea shanty kind of sound and I thought it would be quite easy and not too stressful, but actually the first rehearsal Ed Gardner sat with all the others and made me sing, and it's probably one of the most nerve-racking experiences I've ever felt. But it's been great and I can't wait.



**Are there any particular challenges?**

The only challenge was whether they were going to put me offstage so that they could get the right sound that Ed wanted, which is what we've done. I laughed to my friends: I go to the gym, I train really hard and now they've put me offstage. All that work for nothing!

**You've also been singing in Glyndebourne on Tour's production of Handel's *Saul* and you've also been doing some Bach in Canada. That's very different music from Wagner, so how do approach singing them?**

I like to think, that having had a good musical upbringing – I was a cathedral chorister – and very good coaching that you sing with the same voice and that you make it work. I like doing Evangelists and when I do, I sing in the same way I'll sing the sailor, if that makes sense. You add stylistic qualities rather than the vocal qualities and try and sing with the same voice for everything.

**You took a bit of time out from singing in the classical world. Can you tell us about that?**

It was doing an opera group called Amore. I left college and was doing 'Owen Wingrave' in Nuremberg and then an opportunity arose that I thought was a good one. I spoke to my teacher and the head of vocal faculty at college at the time who said that as long as I sang well it would be ok. We signed to Warner Brothers. It's a very different world but I would never change it, I loved doing the gigs, I loved singing at venues that I would probably never have the chance to sing at in the classical world, I met some amazing people. The main thing for me is I became ambassador for a number of charities and I still do a lot of work with those organisations. It's very important that classical music does that sort of thing, that it does wake up to the fact that it can't just sit there, it has to get out there and do things.

**What are those charities?**

Well Child, which is a national charity for sick children, Operation Smile, which helps children with cleft lip and cleft palate and other facial conditions. And more recently I've created my own charity thing that's called #Carols4Cancer. For the past two years, every Advent, I do something every day. The first time I did it, a friend had died and decided I'd try and do something in her memory. So I thought, when I wake up every morning the first thing I'm going to do rather than talk to anyone is try and sing a carol, then nominate some other people and put it online, it'll be quite funny. We raised £3000 doing that. 18



This year I've got a little something up my sleeve for what I'm going to be doing every day. Hopefully we'll get £5000 this year. We had people from the press on it, it went quite international – more and more people were hearing about it and saying: can you nominate me?

**You mentioned that you were a chorister as a boy. What was that like, and what did you get out of it musically?**

My brother and I were given very good scholarships to go to Exeter Cathedral. We weren't really of the same stock, as it were, as other people at the school who were paying full fees, and grew up in a pretty rough area. For us it was quite a change. Musically, it was something I'd never experienced before: polyphony and Byrd and Palestrina, Stanford and all that. But also mentally, and as a human being, it taught me a lot. I learnt how to talk to different people from different walks of life – at the end of the service when you have congregation members come up and talking to you, you realise how to talk to them. Lucian Nethsingha, who was the organist at Exeter, he was an amazingly inspiring man who wanted everything very precise – he let the music breathe but had a very clear idea of what he wanted. I carried that with me as a choral scholar at Truro Cathedral under Robert Sharpe and Christopher Gray.

For me as a tenor, that's kind of where I started. They said I should start having lessons, and that's when things started to kick in. People started to say, you're not that bad; maybe you should go and apply for the Royal College of Music. So I went and auditioned there. Midway through my second aria, they stopped me. I thought: oh no, they must think I'm really bad. But they offered me a scholarship on the spot. For me it was a big shock. I do now feel like I belong and I love the classical world and everything about it, but at the start I felt a bit nervous about it: I didn't go to music school, I'm not the brightest spark when it comes to certain stuff. But I love singing and I'm very passionate about it, and I think that came across.

