

ANDREW TEAGUE'S REFLECTIONS ON NEARLY NINE YEARS AT BRADFORD

First, can I say how delighted I am that we now have an Old Choristers Association at Bradford, and thank you to everyone who has helped to get this off the ground.

By the time you read this, it will be general knowledge that I shall be relinquishing my post as Organist and Master of the Choristers as of 30th September. On 1st October I set off for a six week examining tour to Hong Kong. This will have a curious symmetry to it, as the last time I was in Hong Kong examining was in 2002, and little did I know then that by Easter 2003 I would be in charge of the music at Bradford Cathedral.

What have we achieved in nearly nine years? When I arrived there were many challenges. Not only had there been over a year's interregnum since my predecessor's departure, but the Cathedral itself was on the verge of bankruptcy. Apart from a small and loyal core, choir attendance was patchy to say the least. There were no midweek evensongs, and no recital series. All these things came about thanks to the support and initiative of our then Dean, Chris Hancock. The Monday evensong soon became a regular feature and this has recently been augmented by an additional service on Tuesdays.

A major step forward has been the reintegration of the Bradford Choristers to the cathedral. The Choristers had functioned in effect as a cathedral choir in exile since 1981, and this was plainly not a healthy state of affairs. Thanks to the initiative and enthusiasm of Malcolm Warburton, Richard Darke and others, a process of assimilation began with an evensong in the cathedral in October 2003. This was followed by increasingly regular participation by Choristers members in Cathedral events, including the tour to Canada in 2005. In 2008 the Choristers moved to the Cathedral together with their music library and infrastructure, so that for the first time boys' and girls' choirs could function independently from a position of real strength. At present there are around 18 boys and 18 girls in the choir.

Over the last 9 years the repertoire has increased considerably. On my arrival there were no more than four or five canticle settings regularly sung, and virtually no communion music apart from congregational settings. Today the choir boasts nearly 40 canticle settings, and a wide range of communion music from Byrd and Palestrina to Langlais, Kodaly and Vaughan Williams. Viennese Mass Settings by Schubert, Mozart and Haydn prove very popular with the congregation.

What of the future? I firmly believe that with the infrastructure we now have - a highly capable music department members including not only an Assistant Organist and Assistant Director of Music, but also a Music Administrator, and in addition a supportive and very able team of clergy, that the music at Bradford can go from strength to strength.

We have been working on a CD of Christmas music which should be available in late September. My only regret is that we have still not broken into the broadcasting world, but it is hoped that within the next twelve months both a Sunday morning Radio 4 broadcast, and possibly even a Radio 3 broadcast may finally happen. I for one will be watching from the wings with keen interest.

REMINISCENCES FROM IAN THOMPSON ABOUT LIFE AS A BOY TREBLE IN BRADFORD CATHEDRAL UNDER CHARLES HOOPER

Welcome to this first Old Choristers Newsletter. As nominal chairman, I thought it appropriate to hark back to my time as a chorister and give an account of what things were like over half a century ago, in the 1950s under Dr Charles Hooper.

Life was very different in those innocent, safer, far-off times, when a 9 or 10 year-old boy could travel alone by public transport on a dark winter evening; from where I lived in Wibsey I had to walk across the town centre from the bus terminus in Tyrrell St and there was never a sign of danger. Indeed the only out of the ordinary types were the "teddy boys" hanging around Farmer Giles' Milk Bar opposite the bus stop!

When I joined as a probationer the cathedral was basically the old parish church; the first stage of extensions - the vestry and song-room was completed just before my voice broke in 1956 and I remember the opening service. Donald Coggan was bishop, John Tiarks the Provost (we had the same birthday and exchanged cards!). Dr Hooper, the Director of Music wrote an anthem for the occasion "Since I am coming to that Holy Roome" to words by John Donne, and a young Keith Rhodes was his assistant.

Charles Hooper was not a great organist, in fact he never played voluntaries, but he could certainly improvise - to the extent that some of his hymn accompaniments were virtually unrecognisable to the average member of the congregation (e.g. my mother)! However he maintained a good spirit in a large choir (the stalls were always full, with the probationers sitting behind the men) containing some remarkable voices, including the thunderous bass of Bill Davies, the fine baritone of Bill Graves and the lovely light tenor of Willy Gott; there were also some accomplished boy soloists, none more so than Terry Ashworth, whose Hear my Prayer was to my ear the equal of Master Ernest Lough on the famous Temple Church recording. He would also excel in Mozart's Laudate Dominum and the Easter Hymn from Cavalleria Rusticana which we often rendered on Easter Sunday!

I think it fair to say that Dr Hooper was greatly loved by his choristers; unfortunate that his playing did not improve with time and once the extensions were complete, with a fine new organ, it was perhaps inevitable that he would eventually have to be replaced, but appropriate that after a false start (Frank Woodhouse, who was only in position for a matter of months) the position should be taken up by Keith Rhodes, who by then had an enviable reputation as a choir trainer.

That then is a bit of ancient history! I will tell more of my continuing relationship with Bradford Cathedral next time.

WELCOME TO THE NEW PRECENTOR AT THE CATHEDRAL

Canon Sam Corley has only been with us since January but he is already well established in his role as Canon Precentor. His continued support and advice are a great encouragement to all of us connected with the choir.

Bradford Cathedral Choral Services

Sunday 10.15 Choral Eucharist (Full Choir)

Choral Evensong

Sunday 4pm alternate Girls or Boys & Lay Clerks

Monday 5.30pm Girls & Lay Clerks

Tuesday 5.30pm currently Boys & Lay Clerks,
Lay Clerks or Chamber Choir

Bradford Cathedral

Contact information

Bradford Cathedral

1 Stott Hill, Bradford BD1 4EH

Main office 01274 777720

Choir email:

choir@bradfordcathedral.org

www.bradfordcathedral.org

Bradford Cathedral

Old Choristers

Association

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Future Musical Events at Bradford Cathedral

King James Bible Anniversary Concert: Friday 8th July 7.30pm

Summer Compline: Thursday 9th, 16th, 23rd June 9.00 pm

Trinity Sunday: 19 June 10.15, Choral Eucharist - Haydn Little Organ Mass
with Strings

Patronal Festival: Wed. 29th June 7.30pm - Mozart Missa Brevis in Bb

Annual Choir Prize Giving Evening: Thursday 30th June 7.00pm

Autumn Wednesday lunchtime Organ Recitals commence on 7 September

BRADFORD CATHEDRAL OLD CHORISTERS ANNUAL RE-UNION WILL TAKE PLACE ON SUNDAY 18 SEPTEMBER 2011

Sung Eucharist will take place at 1015 for those who can make it but proceedings will commence officially with lunch in the cathedral at noon. After this, there will be an opportunity for you to look round the cathedral to see the various recent developments that have taken place, particularly the exhibition connected with the King James Bible anniversary. The AGM will follow, when a Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer, along with a small committee, will need to be elected. The day will end with Choral Evensong at 4 o'clock, when, as last year, former choristers will be asked to join the choir to sing a piece of music at the end of the service. We hope that some of our ex Girl Choristers will join us this year - in 2010 it was an all male affair!

This will be a good opportunity for members to say farewell to Andrew before he takes his well earned retirement at the end of the month. There will be a tribute to him and the achievements he has made during his time at Bradford in the next issue.

FRANK WOODHOUSE

Does anyone have recollections of Frank Woodhouse? He was briefly Organist & Choirmaster after Charles Hooper departed but, apparently, left after a short time to pursue other avenues and was then succeeded by Keith Rhodes. Keith was the number two on the short list when Woodhouse was appointed.

This is our first newsletter of 2011 and we have plenty of news and information, which we hope will be of interest to you. In it you will find details of forthcoming events and news about the Cathedral Choir's activities during the past few months. The picture below was kindly sent in by Harry Atkinson and shows members of the cathedral choir singing Christmas carols in Bradford's Arndale Centre in December 1980. Other such photographs like this will be warmly welcome for inclusion in future newsletters.

The Secretary would like to thank all those ex-choir members who have contacted him recently. One person wrote, having seen my article in 'Once a Chorister', the National Federation's magazine. I have a few copies of this - please let me know if you would like one—first come first served!

