

St John's College, Cambridge in 2010

The Choir Association

It was another great year for the Association with four highly successful and well-attended events, an increase in Members' subscriptions and an increase in the number of new Friends, Benefactors and Patrons.

The year began with the **Epiphany Carol Service Tea** which was held in the Old Music Room in First Court; a chance for Members to recharge with a cup of tea after some long journeys and with the wind whistling cold outside, added to the opportunity to meet up with contemporaries in the Choir. There was a huge range of years in the Choir represented, from some of Herbert Howells's Choristers to Gents from David Hill's time, as well as Friends and current members of the Choir and their families. The Association was given, as usual a reserved section in the Chapel near the Choir and many commented on the beauty of this candlelit service. The service is only five years old and will hopefully continue, along with our Tea, for many years to come.

Next up was our most popular event of the year, the **Garden Party** where the College saw over 200 returning Choristers, Gents and their families, on a very English summer's day! For a few Pimms-tinted hours in the Master's Lodge Garden a vast spectrum of generations mingled together, later joining with the Choir for a rousing Evensong of Wood in E flat (n^o 2) and Howells *Like as the hart*. Those returning to the Chapel were pleased to hear that the Johnian sound is as strong as ever and current members of the Choir were pleased to be surrounded by those with a similar approach to making music!

Thaxted Festival Reception – As well as the annual events, we were thrilled to host one more last year. Before the Choir's concert at the Thaxted Festival, a number of Members met together with some current Gents and their families hosted opposite the church by Sybil King for drinks and canapés. We are very grateful to Sybil and to **Stephen Odom** (1959-64) for helping to organise this.

The final gathering of the year was the annual **London Drinks** which was held once again in St Bart's, West Spitalfields. This event is generously sponsored by former Chorister, **David Wheeler** (1953-57), in memory of his brother, Peter, aimed in particular at the younger generations of Members; and this year we saw a large number of former Gents and Choristers from the last 20 years, as well as a strong representation from earlier generations, enjoying a fine selection of Belgian Trappist beers. The Association's AGM preceded the Drinks where the increase in membership and recent generous donations were noted, and our Chairman, Paul, spoke briefly at the Drinks, looking forward to the Quincentenary Year of the College. A large group of former and current Gents took the night even further at a local curry house – a former tenor in the Choir was pleased to notice that the establishment was 'Fully Air-Conditioned'!

As the Choir Association goes from strength, we look forward to the rest of this Quincentenary year. In the rest of this section of the Magazine, you can read more about the Choir Association's progress in terms of its membership and subscriptions as well as the news of our Members and those who enjoyed Bursaries in 2010.

Choir Report

Once again the Choir was a prolific ambassador for the College in another incredibly busy year. Three international tours, combined with the continued success of the Webcasting Project, have meant that the sound of St John's really has gone out into all lands, reaching a staggering number of people in the course of twelve months.

In its primary function, leading the worship in the College Chapel, the Choir sang at nearly two hundred services during the year. Book-ended by the Epiphany and Advent Carol Services, all of which saw every seat in the Chapel filled, there are several particular services worthy of specific mention. The Choir was joined by Members of the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment for three further Cantata Evensongs. Putting these fantastic Bach pieces back into the liturgical context they were written for has proved immensely popular, not only providing uplifting music, but also the opportunity for the Choral Scholars to sing with some of the best orchestral players in the world. In addition to a performance on BBC Radio 3's *In tune* in March, Chapel services were broadcast live on the Radio on three occasions, twice for BBC Radio 3 – Choral Evensong on Wednesday 28 April (which included a memorable and thought-provoking performance of the Harvey Canticles) and the traditional Advent Sunday Service (including the premiere of *The Call* by Roxanna Panufnik, which had been specially commissioned by the College for the service) – and once on BBC Radio 4 for their Morning Worship series. Once again the Choir climbed the 163 feet to the top of the Chapel tower to commemorate Ascension Day – as usual hundreds of people gathered in the court below, eager to be a part of the century-long tradition of proving the Choir can indeed be heard from on high!

The Choir also sang a number of joint services with other College choirs throughout the year – Eucharist with Gonville & Caius in January, Evensong with Clare in March and at King's in July, where the music chosen was all by Samuel Sebastian Wesley in celebration of his centenary which fell in 2010.

The Choir has one of the largest and wide-ranging repertoires of any of its kind and this was exemplified in 2010 by some exciting collaborations. In January the Choir signed an exciting five CD recording contract with Chandos Records – see the Chandos article later on in the Magazine. It was particularly pleasing to perform a work by Richard Wilberforce, former Alto Choral Scholar. All of the pieces written were subsequently featured in the Choir's weekly Webcasting Project, which continues to go from strength to strength, with an average of almost 10,000 people a month streaming our services.

Outside of their liturgical context, the Choir is much in demand as Concert artists, undertaking three tours during 2010. The Easter tour to Milan and the picturesque world heritage site of Bellinzona saw the Choir give tremendously well received concerts of early music in both venues. However the unseen menace of volcanic ash played havoc with plans for the return journey. All flights were grounded, and the Choir's formidable administration team swung into action. Credit must go to the staff involved for organising a safe and (relatively) swift passage home; an eventful 650 mile coach journey across Switzerland and France to Dieppe, a four hour ferry crossing and a coach from Newhaven to Cambridge, ensured that everyone arrived home only five hours behind schedule.

The Choir received an invitation from a Johnian to take part in a private engagement in Munich in September. This was a glorious occasion during which the Choir sang Mozart's *Missa Brevis in F Major* and a selection of hymns with verses sung in English, French, German and Swedish, to complement the pan-European congregation. The Choristers greatly enjoyed meeting Kofi Anann, former Secretary General of the United Nations and the Gents took full advantage of a visit to the 200th annual Oktoberfest which opened that weekend.

At Christmas the Choir travelled to Denmark for two concerts in Logumkloster and Herning. Although the weather was exceptionally cold and there was a considerable amount of snowfall during our stay, the Choir sang a selection of seasonal favorites to two very enthusiastic audiences. Logumkloster was particularly memorable – the church seated 500 people, but nearly 800 squeezed into the church, many bringing their own chairs to sit on and – much to the amusement of the Choir – the audience included a seemingly appreciative cat in the front pew!

Other UK concerts included a return visit to the Thaxted Festival in June, preceded by a very well attended reception for Choir and College alumni, a sell-out concert in the Speech Room at Harrow School in November and Christmas concerts in Chapel and at St Mary's Church, Hadleigh, Suffolk (a College living).

In October the Choir welcomed the following new members – Freddie James (Junior Organ Scholar), Tom Blackie (Alto), Guy Edmund-Jones and Sam Oladeinde (Tenors), Geoff Clapham (Bass) and Max Boorman, Alex Jones, Peter Nethsingha and Rufus Pawsey (Probationers) – and were delighted to welcome back Bass, George Dye, following his year studying in Russia.

We all look forward to the rest of a particularly busy Quincentenary Year!

Caroline Marks

Choir Administrator

Gents Report (October 2009 – December 2010)

Once again, it seems that the impossible has been achieved, namely that this year has been even busier for The Gents than last year. We have performed at many events throughout the country and have released our Christmas CD, “A Gentle Christmas”.

We were sad, as ever, to bid farewell to our leavers in July 2009. Gareth John and Sammy Furness have completed their first year at the Royal Academy of Music. Tom Verney couldn't quite wrest himself out of our grasp and so, after the retirement of Leo Tomita, made his glorious return to the Gents from his sabbatical term. We also miss Dominic Kraemer's creamy baritone and Olie Hunt's luscious alto. George Dye also left us for the year to have his year abroad in Russia, but we took solace in the fact that he was to return in October 2010.

Stepping in to fill the empty spaces in The Gents was a fine group of young men. Showing no signs of any lack of confidence either in their singing or otherwise, they proved themselves from the start of the year, always taking time to warm up before Evensong and doing their utmost to let a bit of 'fresh air' into the song school. Huw Leslie and Dan Macklin added to the already thundering bass line; Nick Edwards bolstered the alto section with his impressive chest voice; James Imam made his own contribution. We were lucky enough to be joined for the year by Johnny Langridge who has helped us in recent times to make even closer ties with the school; Ed de Minckwitz also made the step up from a year in another choir to join us as a Lay Clerk, and Jules Gregory, a former Chorister from the CJR years, returned to us after a short spell at School.

The run-up to Christmas is always busy for The Gents and this year was no exception. The preparation was all the more important because it was leading up to our launch concert of 'A Gentle Christmas', our celebrated new CD which includes such hits as Wham's *Last Christmas*, Slade's *Merry Xmas Everybody* and Mouton's *Nesciens Mater*. This Christmas concert was such a success last year (more so than we could have imagined) that people were scrambling around to find their own chair from the antechapel because the main section of the Chapel was completely full. We were delighted to get as eager a crowd for 2009. To get ourselves ready for this we once again filled The Maypole to the brim for our traditional Christmas gig, celebrating the festive season at The Gents' true Cambridge home. Our concert tour continued with performances in Ramsey and Braughing and then with the Choir, a performance in Birmingham Symphony Hall and a trip to Amsterdam.

We also this year began our friendship with the Global Poverty Project (GPP) to whom we donated some of the proceeds of our CD launch and at whose Cambridge presentation we sang. We are hoping to collaborate further in the future.

At Easter we enjoyed a whistle-stop tour of Milan and Bellinzona. For this we were joined by a Gent hailing from the self-styled 'golden era', Rich Wiberforce (Alto 2003-2007), patballer extraordinaire. Icelandic eruptions did their utmost to prevent the omnipotent Caroline from returning us home. Stoked up on andante pasta we braved the fourteen hour coach journey home on our “Romantic Tour Bus” and made it safely back to England.

Always fond of establishing new 'traditions', The Gents felt inclined to add a few more to the list over the last two years. We have instituted 'The Gentlemen of London', a flexible group of recently (and not so recently)-graduated Gents who sing at engagements

in London and elsewhere for us while we are away. It has become our permanent backup team and gives the old boys a chance to have a go, even if they're a bit out of the loop!

In September we performed at a reception for high-profile wedding in Germany which Kofi Annan attended. The groom, himself a Johnian and knowing The Gents, booked us in for a trip to Oktoberfest. Despite lacking the requisite lederhosen, we felt we fitted in very well and acquired an eclectic group of German friends who much enjoyed learning some of the less well known of British traditions!

It was matter of great sorrow for us to see a group of very talented young singers leave St John's at the end of 2009, Ed de Minckwitz, Johnny Langridge, Leo Tomita, Tristan Hambleton and Francis Williams, though we are lucky enough to have held on to Pablo 'Juan' Strong and Bradley Smith, our Musical Director over the last year, as Lay Clerks for a year.

The vacuum was reassuringly and amply filled by our new intake of freshers in October 2010. Sam 'Simba' Oladeinde and Guy Edmund-Jones, the latter being the owner of a staggering collection of bow-ties, joined the ever-Strong Team Tenor. We also welcome Tom Blackie and Tim 'Marie' Teague, two very fine counter-tenors, and Geoff Clapham who has taken a short break from his modelling career to sing bass for us. Last but not least, Freddie James has joined us as our Junior on 'keys' and, so I hear, is currently working on his fast-developing, as his beard, alto voice. In the run up to the Christmas season, we enjoyed the usual array of gigs – singing for dinners, concerts and parties – although we were devastated not to be asked back to sing for our friends at the Cambridge University Potato Growers Association. Murmurs about budget cuts...We also sang our popular, free Chapel Concert which was packed out and helped us raise over £700 for Clic Sargent, as well as to sell the final stock of our first 2000 Christmas CDs – not bad for one year!

The highlight of the Gentle Christmas however was, as ever, our Maypole gig: the Gents' pub burst at the seams as we gave them a live performance of our recent CD, this year directed by Francis Williams while our MD, Bradley Smith, was auditioning for music college (he was successful..)

Lastly, I would like to thank The Master and Mary for their insatiable support of all that we do, the College for all that it does for our benefit and Caroline Marks for her unfailing enthusiasm and organisation, without which our time in the Gents and in the Choir wouldn't be half as enjoyable! I wish Huw Leslie the best of luck and hard labour as my successor.

Basil McDonald

Manager