



Annual Newsletter

Gloucester Cathedral
Old Choristers
Newsletter July 2011

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Reunion Booking Form attached

Your Committee:

Chairman: John Heywood

Treasurer: Raymond Highley

Secretary: Stephen Power

Membership: Elvin Young

Federation Liaison: Vacant

OC Concert: Andrew Douglas

School Liaison: Nic Sims

Alan Iles

Adrian Partington

Cann Neil Heavisides

Graham Terrett

Richard Cann

From the Chairman

John Heywood, Chorister 1982-88

My first full year as Chairman has come and gone, and I'm nearing the end of the second; how time flies. It started with an AGM and Reunion Dinner that boasted the highest attendance ever (with the exception of the 50 anniversary dinner), and it was very pleasing to see a significant representation of our younger members once again. On the committee we saw a change in Secretary; with Dickon Kelly passing the baton on to Stephen Power. Dickon did an amazing job during his tenure, for which the Association owes him a vote of thanks; the success of the entire reunion weekend was in no small part down to a huge effort on his part. I'm pleased to say that Stephen has risen to the challenge, and your Association is in good hands, although it's fair to say that more help would always be appreciated. The membership database is progressing, but is still not completely populated, and the GCOCA website has been somewhat neglected. Progress in both these areas has been disappointing, especially considering that I highlighted both of these as key

areas that needed special focus, but we are making slow progress (on the database at least) and rest assured that we will get there. I'm also sorry to report that the Association was not represented at the 2011 FCOCA AGM; we don't currently have a Federation representative, and I unfortunately found myself unable to attend. Next year's Federation AGM is at Portsmouth on May 12th, with the Federation festival being held at York between July 6th and 8th. It's an excellent way of visiting other cathedrals around the country, so if you think you might be interested in attending either of these please don't hesitate to get in touch. Indeed, the Committee would also welcome new faces to help share the workload, so please do contact me or the Secretary if you think you might be able to help. At this year's reunion we will be staging our biennial concert on Friday in addition to the AGM and Reunion Dinner on Saturday, at which we welcome our new President, Dean Stephen Lake to speak. I look forward to seeing you there.

Choir News

Adrian Partington, Director of Music

The last 12 months have been an enormously busy and musically-exciting time for the Cathedral Choristers. They have also been months of unprecedented change in the Cathedral Choir, because for various reasons no fewer than 9 boys have had to leave the choir which is almost half our total number of choristers. The loss of so many experienced choristers has placed a huge burden on the younger boys; but they have risen magnificently to the challenge and there have been no perceptible lowering of standards. In fact, the younger boys have learnt so fast that 8 year-olds are currently achieving what 10 year-olds were formally expected to achieve, and therefore the next few years for the choir look particularly exciting.

The boys who have left in the last 12 months each gave splendid service in their own way, they are: Jamie Conway, Fergus Watson, Alex Chapleo, Callum Stone, Tom Whichelo, Oscar Hughes, Henry Binns, Harrison Cox, William Hollands. In addition to these 9 boys the current Head Chorister, Harry Morgan, will be leaving the choir after the Three Choirs Festival in August.

Of course despite these many departures from the Treble line, 'the show has to go on'. The life of a chorister in the Three Cathedrals of Gloucester, Hereford and Worcester is dominated by the Three Choirs Festival from May to August each year, in a way that outsiders probably cannot imag-



ine. No other Cathedrals in the UK have this wonderful and historic Festival to perform at each year but it involves the choristers in each city with a huge amount of extra work. The 2010 Gloucester Festival was generally considered to have been a vintage year with the national newspapers writing very positive reviews on each day of the Festival. The Choristers sang in 3 concerts, 5 services, a BBC broadcast; and took part in an important first performance (John Joubert's English Requiem). At the time of writing the boys are busy preparing for the 2011 Worcester Festival which involves regular trips to Worcester for rehearsals and a large amount of new music to learn.

The other prestigious events which took part in include: a performance of Mahler's 3rd Symphony with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales in Cardiff which was broadcast live on Radio 3; a performance of Holst's Hymn of Jesus with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra in Bristol and two BBC broadcast Evensongs one in August in the other in February. The Choir also gave concerts at Deerhurst Priory, Northleach Parish Church and Stow on the Wold Parish Church; and performed at Tom Walkinshaw's Memorial Service where they were thrilled to see many stars from the world of sport and subsequently enjoyed attending a rugby match at Gloucester's Kingsholm Stadium.

.....Continues on page 4

An Old Chorister's Recollections: William Armiger, former Lay Clerk, In conversation with Howard Smith, *Chorister 1923-28*



Howard is probably one of the most senior of the living old choristers, and it was fascinating to talk with him. This is a man who remembers Elgar conducting, who was present at the (in)famous hat-throwing event by Dame Ethel Smythe, and who was an exact contemporary as a boy of Melville Cooke.

Howard goes on to say...

I was born in 1913 and had already been a pupil at Kings School for several years since the age of 6 years. I was one of the youngest children out of 10 and the whole family had regularly gone to the very well-attended church of St. Luke the Less on the Bristol Road (now demolished and replaced by St. Stephens). Every day my sister and I walked the three miles from Hempsted to school. My father owned a timber yard by the Sharpness Canal in Gloucester, and my nine brothers and sisters and I lived with our parents in a large house called Elm Lodge in Hempsted. We had moved there from Tuffley Crescent some years earlier. However, when the depression caused the economic collapse of my father's firm, he was made bankrupt.

After the First World War, all timber contracts were cancelled, but my father felt fairly secure, confident that our large house and extensive grounds would sell for at least £6300: it sold for £2600! One of the major contributory causes of the lack of demand for houses in Gloucester at that time was because there had been a serious outbreak of smallpox: and no-one wanted to move into such a hazardous area. So we had to leave our home. It was therefore important that I secured a chorister scholarship at the cathedral - if only to ease the financial burden on the family. My father simply could not afford the fees, as one of my brothers already attended Dean Close School as a boarder, the other later went to The Crypt School - and the fees from both these schools were already beginning to impose a significant financial strain at home. In those days a bankrupt was only allowed to take the family beds and the tools of his trade: everything else went under the hammer and we moved to a house in Kingsholm, where the rent was £8.6s.8d (£8.33p) for 6 months. So, in the summer of 1923, at the age of 10, I became a chorister.

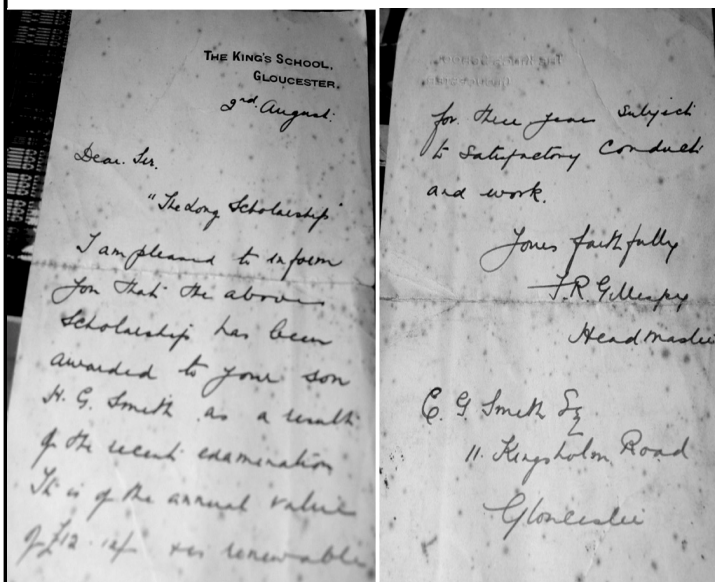
The audition had been conducted by Dr. Herbert Brewer and had taken place in the practice room during an afternoon rehearsal. All the other choristers were there, so it was quite an ordeal. Musically it was not too demanding. Sing a note given on the piano; sing the lower of two notes; sing the middle note of a three-note chord; play a piece on the piano. It was mandatory that all choristers should play at least one musical instrument.

So I was accepted and entered as a probationer in June 1923 and, on the recommendation of the Headmaster, I secured a Long Scholarship at the school: the boy who came second got a prize of 12 guineas (1 year's school fees). The scholarship examination was in a room adjacent to what is now the school gymnasium, close to an external entrance to the large school room which has since been converted to the cathedral library.



Above: The Smith family at Hempsted (c1917).

Howard is sitting on his elder sister's knee on the right.



Dr Brewer was himself a former Gloucester chorister. He was very strict and something of a forbidding figure, just like a typical Edwardian school teacher. However, he was not only a supremely fine musician, he was also a good administrator. And coupled with that rather formal exterior there was a kindly human thread which showed itself in occasional outing with the choristers to the cinema and, once a year, to the pantomime. There was no corporal punishment in the choir - although there certainly was in school and both I and a very close friend, Melville Cook, were caned for talking in class! However the worst choir punishment was to write out twenty double psalm chants in manuscript. This meant drawing the manuscript lines on the paper before you could even begin.

All the school staff except one were clerics. The Headmaster in May 1923 was the Rev. Hayden, who left school later that term under something of a cloud. He was replaced by a Mr Kingsford who was in turn supplanted by Mr. Gillesby. From about 1926 one of the masters was Rev Eric Noot (who retired from the Kings School staff in 1951 but was still living in the Close until his death in 1987).

All choristers went into Form 3. Progress to the form above and so on was not determined by age but by academic progress. If you failed the end-of-year examinations, you stayed where you were. The chorister uniform was Eton jackets (bum freezers), grey trousers, and mortar boards.

The choir routine on Sundays amounted to an 11am Matins and Communion, with Evensong at 3pm. The afternoon service was usually very well-supported, with many people coming especially to hear the sermons preached by a variety of very accomplished and impressive speakers. This service was followed by the long walk home.

We sang a 4pm Evensong each day, apart from Wednesday, with a rehearsal held mid-morning - and, because of a clash of timetables, I missed all my science and art lessons.

During my time in the choir we sang a morning service at 10 am on three days of the week - often to a congregation of only one, and that was usually Miss White, who kept a shop in College Court.

My particular chorister friends at the time were Melvill (sic) Cook, Ivor Morse and Reg Woolford. Melville was, like me, a new boy to the choir, and came from Calton Road School. He had been a chorister at All Saints Church and had played the organ there. He later went on to an illustrious career as recitalist, as organist at Leeds Parish Church and as cathedral organist at Hereford, before moving to Canada.

The men of the choir were an interesting bunch. There was Mr Grey, who usually sang the bass solos. Mr Sanderson was a tenor and there was Mr Finch who had a powerful deep bass voice. There were others whose names I cannot remember, except for Mr Underwood who sang only on Sundays and taught singing. The men of the choirs, together with the choristers are listed in the Carol Concert Programme of December 22nd, 1925.



1926: Rev Eric Noot to the left of the Headmaster, Mr Gillespy. Howard Smith 2nd in from left on the back row.

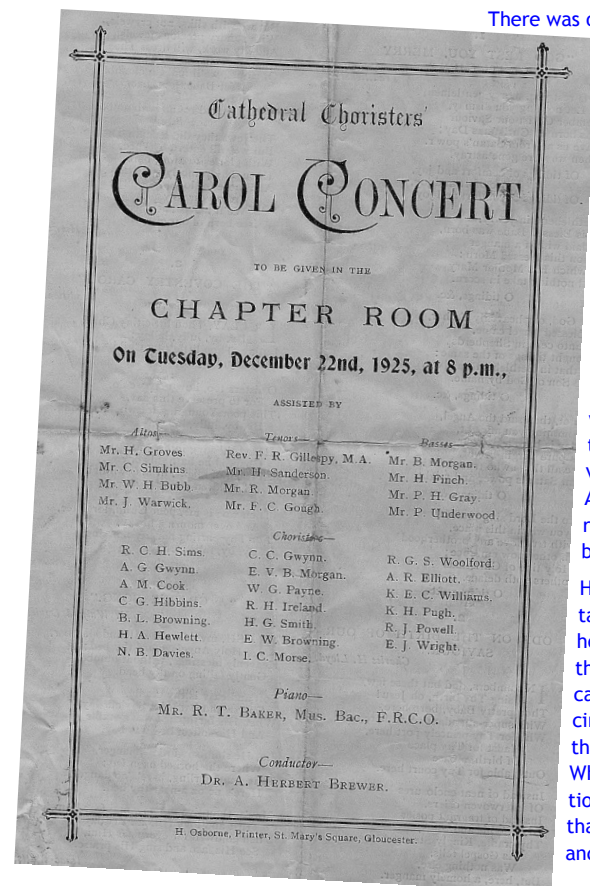
There was one memorable occasion when there was a big solo in an anthem "Look upon the Rainbow" by, I think, William Boyce. The soloist concerned had a broad Gloucester accent and was very self-conscious about missing the 'h' off words and so made a monumental effort to correct this: the result is clearly etched in my memory.

"Look upon the rainbow and consider the beauty thereof.

The Hand of the most High hath bended Hit "!!!

Sir Herbert Brewer died in 1928 - the year I left the choir. It was a Gloucester Three Choirs Festival that year and, as usual, all the Gloucester choristers were involved in singing everything - all concerts and services. In the run-up to the Festival, Sir Herbert was rehearsing a Gloucestershire Symphony Orchestra concert in the Shire Hall - a large and imposing space with balconies and room for a very large audience. The choristers had been roped in to sell programmes. Sir Herbert felt unwell during the rehearsal, and it was supposed that he was suffering from indigestion. He died later that afternoon. Herbert Sumsion, who could have taken over the Three Choirs Festival arrangements, was in America, so this meant that then Assistant Organist, A.J. Pritchard, had to take over the reins for the Festival. Brewer's death really shook me up. He may have been something of a tyrant as far as the boys were concerned, but he was a big man in every sense.

He was cremated, and for his funeral service his ashes were placed on a small table in the middle of the Quire, together with all his doctorate and knight-hood regalia. The whole area between the Quire and the area at the foot of the steps up to the organ - where his remains were to be laid - was covered in a carpet of flowers. Many were formed into heart shapes, and the scent of hyacinths was overpowering. (That scent still conjures up for me vivid images of that occasion). Two slabs had been lifted up at the foot of the organ steps. When I asked why there were two slabs, I was told that the second was preparation for the remains of Lady Brewer. Sadly, when she died some time later, that arrangement was overlooked, and her remains were interred elsewhere, and not in a place of honour beside her husband.



My time in the choir coincided with significant events: the effect of end of the Great War on those young men who returned and the terrible impact of the Depression upon hardworking families figure prominently in my memory. Many of the men associated with the cathedral and the choir had been too young to serve during the War. One of these was, of course, Herbert Sumsion, who had been a Gloucester chorister in his youth, another was a man called Virgo, who branched off into another line and became quite a successful dance-band leader. It was always the custom, when a chorister was admitted as a Foundation Chorister, for the Dean to present him with a Bible during one of the cathedral services. Biology overtook me and my voice broke before I could experience that ceremony: however, Dean Gee invited me to the Deanery and presented me with my Bible, which I still treasure, and it is inscribed in the clear unmistakable handwriting of Dean Gee. And because I had been denied the pleasure of the formal presentation, he kindly gave me a half-crown! Thus ended my chorishership, but not my close personal and emotional ties with the cathedral and its music.

Thanks to Bill Armiger for going to visit Howard after a chance meeting, and to Howard for allowing us the privilege of publishing this article. SP.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Saturday 27th August 2011
7.30pm.

SONGS FOR A SUMMER EVENING
PHILIP WEBB (BARITONE)

Donation tickets: £5.00

At The Salvation Army,
Gloucester. 01452 311332

Friday 23rd September 2011
6.00pm

GLOUCESTER CATHEDRAL CHOIR
PRE-TOUR CONCERT (Quire)

A performance of music for the
forthcoming South Africa Tour.

A CD of the concert will be
available to pre-order or
purchase at the reunion.

2011 REUNION

Friday 7th October
GCOCA in Concert
7.30
(Quire)

Saturday 8th October
Headmaster's Reception
1.00pm
(Paddock House)

Annual General Meeting
2pm
(Chapter House)

Evensong
4.30pm
(Quire)

Dinner
7.00 for 7.30pm
with table service and bar
(Parliament Rooms)
**Guest Speaker: The Very
Reverend Stephen Lake, our
new Dean and GCOCA
President**

2011 price: £23.95
(Full time students £19.95)

**Please return a
Booking Form**

2012 REUNION
Saturday 22nd
September
AGM, Evensong,
Organ Recital and
Dinner

CONTACT US

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Choir News Continued from page 1

The Choir also gave concerts at Deerhurst Priory, North-leach Parish Church and Stow on the Wold Parish Church; and performed at Tom Walkinshaw's Memorial Service where they were thrilled to see many stars from the world of sport and subsequently enjoyed attending a rugby match at Gloucester's Kingsholm Stadium.

The *raison d'être* of a chorister's profession is the regular performance of services in the Cathedral and these have continued throughout the year with great distinction and seemingly to growing congregations. These services range from the spectacular Christmas Carol services where congregations approach the 1000 mark to the daily Evensongs where congregations might be only 30. The boys treat all their engagements as equally important and always give of their best. It has been a thrilling year and next year promises to be even more so with trips confirmed to both South Africa and Sweden.

Chorister Contrasts

Stephen Power, Chorister 88-93

I have been back in Gloucester since April 2010 and am not only settled into the routine of being a lay clerk, following in my father's footsteps, but also as Chorister Tutor, which, for those who don't know, is like being a police officer, a nurse and a diplomat! I've been asked to write about what contrasts I see between life as a chorister in the late eighties and now. Back then, we didn't misbehave, and we always tucked our shirts in and never, ever complained about wearing ruffs!

As I see the choristers at the beginning and end of their school day I guess I have more of an idea than most about how the chorister life has changed: We had rehearsals before school, as they do now, but these days they have Thursday morning off, and rehearse after school on a Monday instead. We used to rehearse on Saturdays mornings, full choir, before going to school, now a thing of the past. Saturdays afternoons had no conductor, so the choir was sub-conducted by two lay clerks, accompanied by the Assistant Organist. Tuesdays was boys' voices, and the head chorister did the sub-conducting most of the time. Fridays, unaccompanied, as now, were directed by the Assistant Organist. We always worked particularly hard on Fridays when Mark Blatchly was here, to try to avoid the inevitable rehearsal after evensong to iron out the mistakes which had gone before! Just occasionally, it all went as he wished, but standards and expectations were as high then as they are now.

After-school-tea actually involved tea, and D.I.Y. jam sandwiches. We were watched at a distance by kitchen staff, who would be preparing an evening meal for the boarders, something else that has changed. In fine weather, the paddock beckoned, and we'd run around for a bit before prep. We would proceed over to the cathedral half an hour later to join the 6 lay clerks who had been rehearsing for a few minutes before our arrival. These days, the juniors finish school and get some prep done before tea, and everyone meets at 4.10 for tea, which consists of soft drinks and sandwiches (already made by the school caterers), followed by football in the gym yard.

In the late 80's, on Sunday mornings we used to sing a psalm or a Te Deum or another Matins canticle as well as the Mass. These days we sing the mass in the more conventional order, and a motet, either as an introit or at the Gradual. The rehearsal for Sunday Evensong, under John Sanders, took place before the lunch break, which left us with a quick warm up at 2.45 (boys only) during which we would sing through the psalm and the hymn. We now rehearse as a choir for 30 minutes before Sunday Evensong. Warm ups these days for the choristers involve a number of stretching and vocal exercises designed to assist their general technique and voice production. I think this is the way the choir has changed most dramatically; the boys can nowadays sound as thrilling as we did in the late eighties, but with far less forced tone, due to a better understanding of the voice and how it works. We did not had proper singing lessons back then. Rehearsals for most services took place in the song room, whereas we tend to rehearse in the choir stalls before all services. There are far more nave services than there used to be, as most Sunday Eucharist Services are in the Nave now. New Nave music

Well done to all of those named to the right of this line->

desks are due to arrive before Christmas, which is something to look forward to.

I used to take home copies of the music scheme each week, and I have still got some copies, with my childish graffiti on some. One states 'my first ever solo!' against Hylton-Stewart Mode 1 on Saturday 18th January 1992. I was 11 years old; choristers as young as eight now get the chance to sing solos. Another service which stands out was Evensong (40th Anniversary of the Accession of H.M. the Queen). Next February, our present choristers will no doubt be singing Zadok the priest, again, to celebrate her majesty's sixtieth anniversary.

Another event in my childhood stands out, and there is a strange twist, which just goes to show how small the Ecclesiastical and Musical worlds are: I was Confirmed on 5th March 1992 by Bishop Robin Woods, who had ended his career as Bishop of Worcester, briefly coinciding with the choristership of a certain Adrian Partington...

We mark the passing of friends of the cathedral, school, and a former chorister of Chester, very much involved in the GCOCA reunions for many years:

Pat David, Headmaster of the King's School (1959-83) died aged 89. A memorial service was held at the cathedral on January 22nd, attended by family, friends, and a large number of former school colleagues and pupils.

Neil Stears, former chorister of Chester Cathedral and a long-time Associate of GCOCA. Colin Charter reflects: Following an Institute of Chemistry scholarship London Neil moved to teach at Brockworth School, Gloucester. He later developed the LEA Science Teaching Centre, promoting professional development and the sharing of good teaching practice. He later became County Science Adviser and an Ofsted inspector.

Neil always maintained a strong interest in cathedrals and choral music. For a period he sang with the St Cecilia Singers and quickly became an Associate member of GCOCA, rarely missing our reunion services and dinners. I knew Neil both as a professional colleague and personal friend, meeting regularly at annual Federation meetings and Festivals.

After his retirement, and settling in Monmouth with his partner Val, he continued to actively support the Federation, Chester OCA, and our Association. Neil later contracted a cancer of the oesophagus. He died in January this year.

For Neil, being a scientist, meticulous planning was always essential, so it was for his funeral at St Thomas' Church, on the bridge at Monmouth. No choir, so he prepared recorded music reflecting his background as a chorister in the '40s as well as his lifelong interest choral music. It all seemed very fitting for the final journey of a former chorister who consistently enjoyed and supported cathedrals and their music.

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The March - Music on Death of Queen Mary, *Purcell*. Sentences from the Burial Service - 1662, *William Croft*. Motet: Thou Knowest Lord the Secrets of our Hearts. *Purcell*. Faire is the Heaven, *William Harris*. Finale to First Symphony, *Vierne*.

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News of former Choristers:

We congratulate former choristers **David Lee**, **David Hurrell**, **Robert Poyser**, **Jack Taylor** who have recently, or who are about to be married.

Alex Mason has left his Director of Music post at St David's Cathedral to become Organist of Shrewsbury School. **Edward Gardner** will conduct the Last Night of the Proms 2011. Be sure to tune in on 10th September! **Jaimie Conway** is about to start a Music scholarship at Uppingham. **Jonathan Hyde**, moves to Cambridge to study music, and to sing at St John's College, under Andrew Nethsingha. **Ciaran Walshe** will spend a year at Portsmouth as a gap year Cathedral Choral Scholar.