

# PETERBOROUGH CATHEDRAL OLD CHORISTERS' ASSOCIATION



2018 NEWSLETTER

## EDITORIAL

P. D. James in "Time To Be In Earnest" uses words about King's College, Cambridge that could well have been written with Peterborough Cathedral in mind. She speaks of "the solemnity, the grandeur and the beauty of the building, the high soaring magnificence of the roof, the candle-lit gloom, the decorous procession of the... choir, the order and the beauty of the traditional service. This...(is) what worship should be."

And this is surely how Peterborough ex-choristers remember evensong from long ago.

One of the reasons that members of the Association attend reunions is to revisit the Cathedral in order to meet up with old friends and also to take part in Choral Evensong. The reunion is always a wonderfully nostalgic occasion which encourages people to have a trip down memory lane and regale others with stories of yesteryear; memories of choristers and lay clerks, organists and clergy, are eagerly shared with like-minded people.

Next year's reunion will take place on Saturday 14 September 2019. We shall revert to our normal schedule of rehearsal, wreath-laying ceremony, choral evensong, AGM and finally reunion dinner. I do hope that as many former choristers as possible will join us on that day. These gatherings can only be a success if people make a special effort to be present. Why not contact some of your contemporaries, and encourage them to join you at the next reunion? They can be assured of a warm welcome. According to members of the Federation of Cathedral Old Choristers' Associations executive, it would appear that our Association is one of the best-organised in the country, as well as one which attracts very good numbers for its annual reunions. We need YOUR help to maintain this reputation. Please make a note of the date of the 2019 reunion in your diary NOW and make a real effort to join us. Thank you.

## 2018 REUNION / FEDERATION FESTIVAL WEEKEND

The Federation of Cathedral Old Choristers' Associations held its annual Festival at Peterborough from Friday 14 to Sunday 16 September 2018 (the Federation Festival was last held here in 1964). The weekend included a good deal of opportunity for singing, tours of the Cathedral, an organ recital, and a Festival dinner at the Great Northern Hotel on Saturday 15 September. (The Federation Festival banquet replaced our annual reunion dinner just for this occasion). We have received a huge amount of very positive feedback regarding the Federation weekend: it was a wonderful opportunity to showcase our magnificent Cathedral, and for delegates to enjoy a feast of splendid music. Our heartfelt thanks go to all those people who helped to plan this important weekend, particularly SAMUEL BARBER, ELIZABETH CUNNINGHAM, SOPHIE ESER, OLLIE HAMILTON-BOX and ALEX SPIRES. Our deepest gratitude goes to LOUISE LAPRUN, who organised this hugely successful event with great efficiency and unobtrusive skilfulness. We presented her with a charming 19<sup>th</sup> century print of the Cathedral and a large bouquet of flowers as a small token of our appreciation for her considerable efforts. It was definitely a weekend to remember.

## STEVEN GRAHL: HAIL AND FAREWELL

Steven Grahl left the Cathedral in the summer to take up the post of Director of Music at Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford. He is also lecturing in the faculty of music in the university, as well as teaching music at Christ Church College. We were extremely sorry to lose him after only four years, but an opportunity like this does not come very often. Peterborough's loss is very definitely the gain of "The House". During his short time here, Steven made a huge impact on the choirs and inspired them to great heights. His calm and measured approach encouraged his choristers, for whom he had great empathy, to achieve their very best. He was always a consummate professional, as well as an extremely pleasant and supportive colleague. We miss his enthusiasm and his genial approach, and we wish him the best of fortune in the future. His successor is Tansy Castledine, who was previously Director of Music of St. Mark's Church, Hamilton Terrace and lately Deputy Headmistress of Wisbech Grammar School. She is a former scholar of Exeter College, Oxford, and The Royal Academy of Music. She has already begun to make her mark in the short space of time since her arrival, and we wish her well.

## NEW CANON PRECENTOR

We welcome The Revd Dr Rowan Williams as our new Precentor. She comes to Peterborough from York University, where she was Chaplain. She was also a minor canon at York Minster. Rowan was with us for the Federation Festival dinner, and was installed in the Cathedral at evensong on Sunday 16 September.

## HARRY COX, 1919 – 2018

Our most senior old chorister, Harry Cox, has died at the age of ninety-eight.

Harry was born in Peterborough on 23 June 1919 and attended St. John's School in Bishop's Road. He was admitted to The King's School in September 1931, and sang in the choir during the time of Dr. Henry Coleman. (His younger brother Reginald was also a chorister). He was in the choir for the celebrated "Broadcast to the Empire" in 1934 (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D5yEGOyesOs>). Harry played a minor role in Goldsmith's "She Stoops To Conquer" in Big School in the Easter term of 1935. In his last year, he was a King's Scholar. He left King's in July 1936 to go into accountancy.

When the Old Choristers' Association (which had been dormant for many years) was revived towards the end of the 'thirties, Harry was elected as Hon. Secretary at the age of nineteen.

He served in the Sherwood Foresters Home Guard during the Second World War. After the war, he worked for Debenhams before leaving Peterborough to work as the Company Secretary for Walton's Department Store in Exeter. He moved to Exmouth in the late nineteen-fifties, where he continued to live with his wife Winnie. Harry's passion for Rugby Union continued from his schooldays, and he was an avid supporter of England Rugby and also Exeter Chiefs.

Harry eventually retired from work to be his wife's full-time carer and looked after her until her death about eighteen years ago. He died at home after a short illness on 18 February, and his funeral took place at Exeter Crematorium on Thursday 15 March. We extend our sympathy to his daughter Judith. Requiescat in pace.

### RAYMOND VENNIMORE JACK BUTT, B.SC., M.SC., F.R.A.S., 1941 – 2018.

Raymond Butt, who died on 23 March, was a pillar of the Association and a regular attendee at reunion dinners. He passed away at Folkestone in Kent after a brave fight against cancer. His funeral service, which took place at the Orthodox Church at Brookwood in Surrey on Thursday 19 April, was attended by old choristers CHRISTOPHER BATHURST and FRANK CLOSE.

Raymond was born in Peterborough on 26 February 1941 and attended St. Mark's Junior School in Gladstone Street, before moving on to The King's School. He was a member of the Cathedral choir from 1952-1956, during the early time of the legendary Dr. Stanley Vann, and was Head Chorister in his last year. Later on, he became a school prefect and rowed in the King's 2<sup>nd</sup> VIII. He left KSP in the summer of 1960 and went up to Edinburgh University to read Physics. Whilst there, he rowed for the university. Later on, he studied Astrophysics at Queen Mary College, London. His first teaching post was at Abingdon School in Oxfordshire, where he taught Physics and coached school oarsmen on the river. In 1968 he moved to The King's School, Canterbury, where he was a member of staff for thirty years. There he was an outstanding teacher of Physics and Astronomy, and taught the first British-born astronaut. He also coached rowing and sculling with a passion. During this time he became a Fellow of The Royal Astronomical Society and lectured in Astrophysics at the University of Kent at Canterbury. When he left The King's School, he became an examiner with the British Physics Olympiad.

He was described in the 'Daily Telegraph' as "a true English eccentric". Raymond could recite Pi to at least 3,500 places and knew the entire UK railway timetable by heart. He was passionate about steam trains (he had an enormous collection of railway tickets), and compiled "The Directory of Railway Stations", which was published in 1995. He was a great rowing enthusiast and for fifty years was a proud member of the Stewards of Henley Royal Regatta. He also found time to sing with the Kent Police Male Voice Choir. Raymond was a great traditionalist and was deeply upset when the Church of England voted to ordain women to the priesthood. As a result of this, he decided to join the Greek Orthodox Church. He was a devout worshipper and sang in the choir of the Orthodox Monastery of St. Edward the Martyr, Brookwood, where he was known as 'Peter'.

Raymond and his wife Jane had two children, Orlando and Elizabeth, but sadly the marriage was not destined to last. With affection and kindly remembrance, we bid him farewell. Raymond was a truly remarkable man. Our reunions will be the poorer without his genial presence: we shall miss seeing that familiar figure, complete with beard and black cassock. Requiescat in pace.

## PERSONALIA

A number of special birthdays have occurred during the course of the year: ANDREW TORBELL was 70 at the end of January, the ever-youthful ALEX SPIRES was 50 in February, BARRY PROCTOR celebrated his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday in March and MICHAEL BARCROFT was 80 in November. Our warmest greetings to them all.

SARAH BYRD (nee Cooper), formerly Head Chorister and Head Girl at King's, was the guest speaker at the school Speech Day in the Cathedral on Friday 14 September. She is currently a news reporter for Anglia Television, and has recently given birth to a son, Adam.

FRED DIMOCK died last year at the age of 98. His daughter Ann has sent us some photographs of the Cathedral choir taken in the early nineteen thirties. Fred appears on these pictures, together with our old friends ERIC DODSON, RON LAXTON, CHARLES MOXON and ERIC SCOTT. These fascinating treasures from the past will be kept among our OC records and will ultimately find a resting place in the archives room at The King's School.

ROBERT FERGUSON has recently had a collection of his poems published. "Late Starter" is available on [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk) at £9.95.

The book is described as "a picture book in words. Each poem stimulates an image of the worlds in which we live, their hills and mountains, cold northern seas and hot deserts, war, peace and loneliness, and the comfort of friends and child-filled families, together with reminders of the inner matters of the soul – faith, worship, birth, death and the hereafter. It is a book to excite, stir, inspire, and frequently to raise a smile at the memories we all share." It was good to see Robert at the Federation weekend in September, as well as other former choristers from his era including MALCOLM EDWARD and ANDREW MADDOCKS.

We have recently heard from MICHAEL GAMBLE, who was in the choir in the late nineteen forties. He recalls choristers playing with train sets in a building on the north-west side of the Minster Precincts (the Dean and Chapter almshouses, now offices). His reminiscences include the names of Dean Noel Christopherson, the Revd. Dr. Donald Southeard (Precentor) and Dr. Douglas Hopkins (Organist and Master of the Music). At that time the choir vestry was situated in what is now the Sacristy, on the western side of the South Transept. Michael recalls the bells in the North-West Tower being pulled by one of the vergers. (In those days, the bell ropes came down from the tower and passed into a small wooden cupboard. One of the vergers was responsible for ringing the bells before services, and could be seen manipulating the ropes in a highly energetic manner). Michael also remembers (long before the days of health and safety) several choristers wandering up into the triforium and clerestory completely unsupervised, and subsequently being berated by Dr Hopkins.

NEIL HUBBARD was a chorister here from 1959-1962. He and another pupil at The King's School boarding house were budding guitarists; they built their own amplifiers using plans designed by electronics wizard DAVID WRIGHT. The duo entertained their chums at Madeley House with renditions of "Sheila" and "Peggy Sue". After leaving school, Neil moved into the world of pop music. He played the guitar on the original 1970 album of "Jesus Christ Superstar". He has performed with Juicy Lucy, The Grease Band, Bluesology, Joe Cocker, Roxy Music and Kokomo, as well as working with Bryan Ferry.

RUSSELL HURCOMBE married Joanna Williams at Newton Solney church in South Derbyshire on 16 June. The former Director of Music at King's, Nick Kerrison, played the organ for the wedding. Russell and Jo are now living in Derby. The couple met at Keele University, where Russell was reading Geology and Jo was studying Pharmacy. They both went on to take Master's degrees in their subjects, Jo gaining a First.

SIMON MOLD has recently been involved in a recording of sacred choral and organ music ("The Beatific Vision"), composed by himself and Charles Paterson. The CD features Leicester Cathedral Chamber Choir conducted by Christopher Ouvry-Johns, with Simon Headley on the organ and Rowena Bass on the harp. This lovely recording is commercially available online, from [spmold@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:spmold@blueyonder.co.uk), or from Herald ([www.heraldav.co.uk](http://www.heraldav.co.uk)). A CD will shortly be released of some of Simon's Christmas carols, entitled "Hush, Little Child", performed by the choirs of Southwell Minster. It will be available from Heritage Music Publishing Ltd.

Canon PETER NICHOLSON, a beloved former Minor Canon and Precentor of the Cathedral, had a hip replacement in July. He has made a very successful recovery from his operation and is now free from pain after a year of discomfort. Peter has recently celebrated his ninety-third birthday: he recalls his days in Peterborough with great affection and sends his best wishes to all who remember him.

Jessie Sibthorp, widow of the Revd. Ronald Sibthorp, died on 6 February 2018 aged 90. She will be remembered by more senior members of the Association. Ronald was Minor Canon, Precentor and Sacrist here from 1939-1945. Apparently, there was a good deal of amusement amongst the choristers when Jessie (who had only just left school) married the seemingly middle-aged Sibthorp (in fact, he was only thirty-three) at the Cathedral in 1945. Ronald Sibthorp, who came from an eminent Lincolnshire family, later founded the Friends of Cathedral Music.

Philip Lank, who was assistant organist here from 1954-55, died on 14 February 2018 at the age of ninety-three. When he left Peterborough he became organist of Oswestry Parish Church, moving from there to St. Wulfram's Church, Grantham in 1961. Philip was organist and choirmaster there for more than two decades; in addition, he was music master at The King's School next to the church. He did a great deal for music-making in the Grantham area; he was also an examiner for the Associated Board.

The scholarly Canon Jack Higham, who will be fondly remembered by many members of the Association, passed away suddenly on 28 June at the age of eighty-five. He was climbing a mountain near Stirling in central Scotland when he collapsed and died. Jack was Canon Chancellor here from 1983-2003; he was a delightful and extremely cultured man, who wore his erudition very lightly. He was a fine historian, one who was easily able to "summon up remembrances of things past". We extend our sincere condolences to his family, and in particular to his widow Pat.

## NEW MEMBERS

We extend a warm welcome to the following new members of the Association: LILY-MAE ALLEN, SETH BARKER, ADAM BELL, GRACE NIKLASSON, LUCAS NIKLASSON, EMMANUEL SHODIMU and AGATA TROC.

## OCA EPIPHANY EUCHARIST | SUNDAY 6<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2019

Peterborough Cathedral Old Choristers' Association has been invited to form a choir to sing at the Eucharist at Peterborough Cathedral on Sunday 6 January 2019, the Feast of the Epiphany. *This is in place of our usual Evensong on 27 December, as a visiting choir from Holland will be singing at Peterborough Cathedral after Christmas.* The Music will be Haydn's **Little Organ Mass** and **Bethlehem Down** by Warlock. There will be a rehearsal from 09:00 to 10:00, and the service takes place at 10:30. All are welcome to sing. Please let Louise Laprun know if you would like to join us, preferably via the Facebook event ([www.facebook.com/oldchoristers](http://www.facebook.com/oldchoristers)). Dress code: dark suits/all black.

With every good wish for Christmas and the New Year,

*Tim Hurst-Brown*

Chairman

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PLEASE DON'T FORGET TO PUT THE DATE OF NEXT YEAR'S REUNION IN YOUR DIARY:

**SATURDAY 14 SEPTEMBER 2019**

Membership to Peterborough Cathedral Old Choristers' Association currently costs **£25 per annum**, though you are most welcome to donate more. As well as assisting former choristers keep in touch with Peterborough Cathedral's ministry and music, the OCA supports current choristers' singing lessons – a valuable part of their musical education.

*Did you know?* It would cost the Cathedral £800 per fortnight to provide a 30-minute lesson for all 40 choristers every 2 weeks. Our annual donation is so greatly appreciated, and we'd love to be able to give more to ensure all choristers are given the same opportunity.

**Peterborough Cathedral Old Choristers' Association**

Sort Code: **20-67-37** Account Number: **60709816**

*Message from Louise:* It costs over £100 each year to post OCA correspondence. Please consider sending your email address to me ([l.laprun@srm.com](mailto:l.laprun@srm.com)) instead, so that we can remove this expense and give more generously towards current chorister singing lessons. Thank you in advance.