



ALBAN NOTES

St Albans Cathedral Ex-Choristers Association
THE CATHEDRAL AND ABBEY CHURCH OF ST. ALBAN

Affiliated to the Federation of Cathedral Old Choristers Associations

ST. ALBANS
CATHEDRAL

Issue 50 Spring 2020

Message from the Chairman

Welcome to our 50th edition of Alban Notes, our regular newsletter published termly, which has been informing you of ECA activities and news since 2007. For this issue I'm delighted that my predecessor, Malcolm Bury, has provided a review of earlier editions looking back over recent years. Andrew Lucas explains in his Choir News how the coronavirus has impacted music making in the Cathedral. As always, I encourage ECA members to contribute articles of interest for future editions.

I must touch on the 'global news' and restrictions placed upon all of us, due to the Coronavirus pandemic. With gatherings of more than 6 people (correct at time of writing) not allowed including within places of worship all our planned events for the coming months have been either cancelled or suspended in the interests of the health of all our members. This includes our AGM which is usually held during the month of June. We look forward to and will meet again once it is safe to do so, but in the meantime do look out for updates on our website or social media pages.



The Cathedral Choir singing with choristers from St Etheldreda's Church at their concert in February

The committee, having studied the latest government advice about social gatherings, have been forced to take some very disappointing, but we suspect not entirely unexpected, decisions about our planned events. It is with the greatest of regret that we have decided to postpone the Hurford memorial weekend in Luccombe originally planned for early September this year and hope to reschedule around the same time in 2021.

I sincerely hope that you and your families are in good health, and if you've experienced symptoms of Covid-19, have been able to recover. I suspect many of our members have been required to 'shield' following health advice and recognise for some this may prove difficult and be quite lonely. Do please get in touch if you would like occasional or regular contact/support via telephone or e-mail during these unprecedented and challenging times.

Despite being unable to attend services in the Cathedral, you may be aware of their [on-line streaming service](#) where you can view live or watch recorded services. The latest [on-line edition of Abbey News](#) is also available which, although is somewhat out of date due to the restrictions, you may find many articles of interest.

I suspect like me you've been standing on your doorsteps at 8pm on Thursday evenings to pay tribute to those on the front line. Whatever stage of work, education or retirement you are in, I hope you are finding opportunities to keep busy and active.



Who knows when or how restrictions will be eased? In the meantime, it is important to support each other and look for the positive each day.

Stay safe.

Richard Lilley

Chairman

Review of Alban Notes on its 50th Edition

The first issue was published as a Members' Newsletter in November 2007 following the reunion in July. Since that time regular updates have been issued giving members news of ECA events being planned together with subsequent reports, profiles of some of our members who have made successful careers as professional musicians, articles of historic interest and commentaries on the ECA's management.

The 2007 reunion, organised by David Ireson, was such a success that it became clear that St Albans Cathedral should once again have its own Ex-Choristers Association (there having had two previous incarnations in the 70s and 80s).

In September 2007, a small working group comprising myself, lay clerks David Ireson and David Martin-Smith and former choir parents Ros de Rivaz and Christine Blackie, met to establish the way forward. The initial work was to establish a virtual committee which comprised myself as chairman, David Martin-Smith as Hon Treasurer and former chorister Bob Staten as Hon Secretary. The main objectives were to:

- develop a membership database as a basis for future communications with members
- design and implement a website which would also hold the computer-based membership database
- communicate regularly with members with regard to future events and relevant news and items of interest, current and historic
- revise and re-instate a formal constitution including establishing a sound organisational structure as the basis for ECA governance and sustainability.

In order to make all this happen, tenor lay clerk Simon Colston was co-opted to help build the members database and website. Former alto lay clerk John Adams and former chorister Libby Godlee were also co-opted to boost the committee. In addition, Dr Peter Hurford was invited to be our President and an Honorary Life Member and subsequently Masters of the Music, Andrew Lucas, Barry Rose, Colin Walsh and Stephen Darlington were invited to become Vice-Presidents thereby providing a potential line of succession. Somewhat later the committee agreed to recognise the work that had been done and was being done to manage and support both the Cathedral Choirs and ECA and gave Honorary Memberships to previous Assistant Organists/AMOMs and co-founders of the ECA.

In 2009, after a brief 'competition,' which Bob Staten won, the newsletter was renamed to Alban Notes which has continued into 2020.



From 2008 to 2011 the Members' Newsletters/Alban Notes were sent out both by e-mail and by post with Bob Staten, who lived in Royal Wootton Bassett, with his children folding and stuffing over 70 newsletters into envelopes and then Bob posting them out - a very laborious and time-consuming task.

Over the next decade, the Association had some considerable successes including the biennial reunions where members had the opportunity to sing Choral Evensong alongside the Cathedral Choir, followed by a reception usually in the Deanery garden.

To help manage the association and its events over this period, several former choristers and lay clerks joined the committee, including Rosie Roberts, Laura Hicks, Susannah Brook, Hannah Watts, and lay clerks John Meager (Hon Treasurer and Vice Chairman), John Tournay, and also Maureen Adams was especially co-opted as Hon Secretary.



Photograph: Colin Whyman

ECA Concert in 2010

Rod Argent, Andrew Parnell, Tom Winpenny, Dr Peter Hurford, Andrew Lucas, Simon Johnson, Dr Simon Lindley

In 2010, we performed our first major fund-raising concert entitled "Their sound is gone out" which included Handel's Coronation Anthems conducted by Andrew Parnell and featured the Abbey Girls Choir with Tom Winpenny, Abbey Singers and Exquire. The concert also featured Rod Argent (performing "She's Not There", the global hit he wrote with his band The Zombies), together with organists Andrew Lucas, Simon Lindley and Simon Johnson.

The second concert in 2012, conducted by David Ireson, with Tom Winpenny playing the organ, was entitled "Give unto the Lord" and again featured the Abbey Girls Choir, Abbey Singers and Exquire. The programme comprised choral works by Parry, Elgar and Vaughan Williams and solo performances by Rogers Covey-Crump (tenor), Stephen Charlesworth (baritone), Claire Innes-Hopkins (organ), Hannah Watts (flute) Bex Muhley (soprano) and Emily Knight (oboe) demonstrating a wonderful array of musical talent.

In 2013, the Cathedral and the ECA hosted the Annual Festival of the Federation of Cathedral Old Choristers Associations where representatives from fifteen English cathedrals came together for a weekend of music and social events which included Friday evening Service of Compline, singing Saturday Choral Evensong with the Cathedral Choir and a Festival Banquet in St Albans Town Hall.

Earlier in 2008, the 50th Choir Camp was held in Luccombe and which was to be the last annual camp. However, in 2013 the ECA returned to Luccombe for a camping weekend. The weather was kind (on this occasion – but not always so) and attendees either camped in the field or stayed in local hotels/B&Bs and also took part in the traditional walks and sang Choral Evensong on the Sunday afternoon.

Another of the highlights of the association has been the emergence of Exquire as an independent group of singers which have sung services of Choral Evensong and Choral Eucharist in recent years as a visiting choir and now has a permanent slot in the annual cathedral calendar.

Whilst there have been some very happy occasions which have taken place over the last decade, and for which reports have been included in Alban Notes, there have also been some sad times with the passing of former choristers and lay clerks, and in particular our President, Dr Peter Hurford and his wife Pat who were tremendous supporters of the ECA and participated in every event when they could.

Alban Notes is now produced termly and is sent to all members via email and also posted on the ECA website. The ECA archive includes copies dating back to the first edition. Hopefully, when the current crisis is over and we return to some sort of normality, Alban Notes will continue to report on our plans and provide colourful reports of our various events.

Malcolm Bury

Honorary Life Member and former Chairman of the ECA

Choir News

I am writing this in the first week of June, almost three months since the cathedral's choirs stopped meeting for rehearsals and singing in services due to the Covid-19 epidemic. I don't know when the choirs were last forced to stop singing during their normal term time, possibly during the Second World War, but maybe it has not happened since the cathedral choir was founded in the nineteenth century.

The spring term started normally enough with the Cathedral Choir going from strength to strength. With the annual choir party behind them, the choir were looking forward to singing a concert on the last day of February in St Etheldreda, Hatfield. Meanwhile the Cathedral Girls Choir sang excellently at their annual service of celebration for the final parts of the Christmas season in the Epiphany and Candlemas procession.



Lay clerks in the Great Hall of Hatfield House before the concert at St Etheldreda's Church in February

By mid-February we were already aware of the dangers of Covid-19 and that it was important to take extra care with hygiene in the Song School, especially around the breaks and at the choir teas. Reminder notices went up around the Song School about the importance of hand washing and taking care with coughs and sneezing. A small number of children were stricken with a flu-like illness just before half term, but we finished on the last weekend with all of them back singing before the break.

The second half of term only lasted for two weeks before choral singing had to be stopped and public worship ceased in the cathedral. It was a brutal and very abrupt end for all the choirs and especially for the boys and girls in Year 9, who have missed out on their last Holy Week and Easter and their final term. The girls' tour to Denmark in May was cancelled as is the recording for the boys and men booked for the week after the summer term ends.

Unfortunately for me I became ill during the February half term break and was not personally able to see the boys and men, nor St Albans Bach Choir, before all singing stopped. I am fortunate though in having very able colleagues in Tom Winpenny and Marko Sever who picked up the challenge of providing music for the weekly webcasts of the Eucharist on Sunday mornings and have done it so splendidly.

The boys, girls and men have become a 'virtual choir' recording hymns, anthems and other parts of the service for these webcasts and the Parish Singers have also been doing a hymn or anthem each week with their director, Chris Muhley. They have also tapped into the archives of recordings and broadcasts (so some of you may well have been singing in these) to provide the other music we need for the liturgies and Tom and Marko have been providing splendid organ music before and after each service.

The boys and girls have been keeping their voices going with regular singing lessons with the singing teachers (via Zoom) and there have been social events online too that all helps to maintain a team spirit. The lay clerks have been a great support and also have been maintaining the Friday night pub tradition (of course!) also utilising Zoom. The Sub Dean and the two minor canons have been giving excellent pastoral support to all the choir members and leading teams on the chorister quiz nights.

But it's not the same and we are all eager to meet each other again, get back into the cathedral and start singing and performing together. Choral singing (and all musical ensemble work) is about working together as a team at the same time, not in isolation in a fragmented way. That human connection and interaction is what is being missed.

We still don't know when we can start singing together as choirs. Sometime in the summer we hope to reopen the cathedral building for public worship, but numbers will be limited by the need to maintain social distancing and it's by no means certain if we will be allowed to have some singers at services.

We hope and pray all will be resolved and that by some time in the autumn term normal services will resume, hopefully in time for a recognisable Advent and Christmas season, but it is still not clear when that will be possible.

You will perhaps be aware that many of the nation's cathedral choirs are now in a precarious position due to the loss of tourist revenue, especially in those places where the cathedrals rely significantly on donations or charges to balance the budget. I think that being an institution that is 'lean and mean' as one former Assistant Master of the Music has described us and with the support of the Music Trust we are hopefully more secure and in a strong position to maintain the musical tradition here. We can but hope that the situation will be resolved quickly and we can make the cathedral's services resound with glorious choral singing once again.

Andrew Lucas

Master of the Music

Music Trust

St Albans Cathedral Music Trust supports the musical life of our Cathedral. Whilst the regular music programme at the Cathedral is suspended, they would like to share with you their spring newsletter - which can be viewed [here](#) - with reports from the music department, reviews of recent Trust events and details of how the Music Patrons provide crucial support.

Although our usual pattern of music cannot yet return, the music department continues to share recordings every day via their Twitter feed ([@StACathChoirs](#)) and provide music for the livestreamed services every Sunday on the Cathedral's YouTube channel.

The choirs are in regular contact too and the Music Trust has funded the technology required for them to sing together virtually, for performances at the VE Day service and Ascension Day service - with more to follow - for which the Cathedral is grateful.

Moira Dean

Honorary Life Member

AGM News

Whilst we were expecting to hold our AGM during June, having considered various options including hosting it on-line, the committee have decided a Chairman's report and Treasurer's statement will suffice this year. Committee meetings will continue as scheduled (on-line where required) with a typical AGM being held next year.

2020 Yearbook

Our 2020 Yearbook is being prepared for publication. Please could I urge all members to review their member record on our website (StAlbansECA.org/member-records) and advise of any updates or amendments **by the end of June**. If you would like to provide an *extended biography*, particularly if you have pursued a career in music, please let us know.

ECA Website - Facebook - Twitter

We hope you are familiar with our website (StAlbansECA.org) and [Facebook page](#) which have been around for some time. We are also on Twitter - [@StAlbansECA](#).

Dates for the Diary

These events are of course subject to future relaxation of current lockdown measures, so watch out for further announcements nearer the time.

Sunday 1st November 2020 *All Saints Day Choral Eucharist*

Wednesday 17th February 2021 *Ash Wednesday*

