



ALBAN NOTES

ST. ALBANS
CATHEDRAL

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

Affiliated to the Federation of Cathedral Old Choristers Associations

Issue 51 Winter 2020

Message from the Chairman

As we start a new year, with much hope that 2021 is kinder than last year, we look forward to a return to some sense of normality. As time passes it is apparent more and more of us are aware of people who have suffered at the hands of Coronavirus, some much closer to us than is comfortable. I wish you, your friends and families my very best wishes and hope you are in good or improving health.

2020 has been the hardest for many in living memory, directly affecting all aspects of our lives and re-writing the rule books, quite literally. The impact on us all has been, and in many cases continues to be significant; but there is hope and light at the end of the tunnel now that the vaccination programme has commenced. Many of our members have received the vaccine already with many more expected to receive in the coming months. Quite when we return to normal is unknown, with the majority of schools closed to all except children of key workers, many employees still furloughed and many places of worship closed, other than for private prayer. Services at the Cathedral continue regularly and are streamed live on [YouTube](#).



Christmas at the Cathedral was very different this year.

Dean Jeffrey John has been our Patron since 2004 but is due to be valedicted on 14th February as he moves to Paris to start the next chapter in his life. I wrote to him recently thanking him for his unwavering support of the ECA and wishing him well for the future. Morning and afternoon services will be streamed on YouTube live on 14th.

At our Autumn committee meeting I was pleased to secure a donation of £250 for the St. Albans Cathedral Music Trust who continue to give vital assistance to music at this difficult time. If you are able to support the Trust's vital work please find out more here: [Support Our Music](#).

Thank you to contributors in this edition of Alban Notes, and to those who have suggested articles for future editions. I look forward to either seeing you in person or on-line later in the year at our AGM, likely to be held in June.

For now, I wish you good health and happiness for the year ahead.

Just remember to "Stay Positive and Test Negative"!

Richard Lilley
Chairman



Choir News

In June last year I wrote about all the changes that had to be made in the summer term to manage the restrictions during the first lockdown. I said *"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."*

After months of recorded music, live music making in services with a congregation present finally resumed in July. First of all, individual singers (lay clerks and a couple of female ex-choristers) led the music at the weekly Eucharist, singing a setting (mostly plainsong or Merbecke) plus some solo motets and arias. The music in these services were like an oasis in a desert and we were very grateful to all the soloists who were willing to come and sing in our services again.

Sunday Evensongs were particularly beautiful, with just a solo cantor and a member of the clergy singing in alternation. We are so fortunate to have two clergy who are excellent and experienced singers as the Sub Dean (Abi Thompson) and Precentor (Jonny Lloyd), both of whom sang professionally in choirs in their former lives. These services, with plainsong responses, psalms and canticles sung alternatim, resonated with our monastic heritage and were greatly appreciated by those who felt able to come.

We continued with this pattern until the end of the summer holiday when we prepared to have the choristers and lay clerks back. The normal Sunday routine of services resumed with the Parish Eucharist in the Nave with the Parish Choir, the Choral Eucharist live streamed from the crossing with a small choir of sopranos and lay clerks in the North Transept and Choral Evensongs in the Nave with the choristers and lay clerks.

It was such a relief to be given the green light for chorister rehearsals and services to resume after such a long period of no singing (since March 15th).

But it was only a brief return to normality, soon broken by the October half term holiday. We managed almost two weeks of a normal pattern of choral services before the second lockdown forced us to stop choristers singing again in November.

This time the government's advice was different: professional performances and rehearsals could take place but amateur choral singing couldn't. Because our choristers go to several different schools we were compelled to stop their rehearsals and services again. The regular special services in that period (All Souls, Remembrance, Justice and the Advent Procession) had to be re-arranged using professional sopranos or postponed.

The Advent Procession became an Advent Carol Service on the second Sunday of Advent, a week later than normal and just 3 days after the boys were able to return to rehearse. They rose to the challenge and sang magnificently - I doubt that anyone would have realised that they pulled it off in such a short space of time.



Three socially distanced ex-choristers provided ¾ of the top line for the four identical Ordination services at the end of October 2020.

Laura Hicks, Emma Huggett and Nina Vinther

Two weeks later we sang **four** Christmas Carol Services (increased from two to allow for as many as possible to attend) plus the usual services on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day morning. The services had to be quite a bit shorter than normal with fewer readings and there were other significant differences. In particular the choir could not safely sing in procession around the cathedral as we customarily would and the congregation weren't allowed to sing the familiar carols.

It's worth mentioning that all choral singing since September has had to take place in the Nave because it's the only place where the singers can stand far enough apart for safe singing. We have had to invest in masks, cleaning equipment and hand steriliser and now have 25 very elegant if somewhat expensive music stands for the singers to use. The choir fills all the space between the organ screen for two and half bays going west (the choir stalls themselves can only accommodate five singers per side standing 2 metres apart - a fifth of their normal capacity).

Sadly the Quire has had to remain largely unused by the choirs because the space is too enclosed to be safe for singing for any length of time. On the few occasions when we have sung one piece from here, we occupied the whole length of the Quire, using the front row and floor for the trebles and the lay clerks stretched along the canons' stalls in the third row. I had feared that the choristers standing so far apart and in such a strange layout would make achieving good ensemble a struggle, but curiously that wasn't the case. We made it up to Christmas Day without anyone showing signs of infection but the new variant of Covid struck immediately after our last services when some of the choristers and lay clerks became ill with Covid in the Christmas holidays.

This term we are back almost to square one. The choristers may not meet in person, but we are continuing to hold their singing lessons and some rehearsals and theory lessons online. The lay clerks plus some sopranos (10 people in all) are currently allowed to sing one service per week at 10am on Sunday in a Eucharist that is streamed online, but without a congregation present. However, unlike some, our cathedral remains open to the public for private prayer and said services, but it's eerily quiet during the day without visitors and school children.

The girls choir managed to hold admissions and valedictions in an Evensong near the start of the Autumn term. Unfortunately the three leaving boys' valedictions have been arranged and then postponed twice, first due to the second Covid lockdown and then two of the three were instructed to isolate by their school a couple of days before the ceremony. Consequently they haven't yet officially left the choir even though their singing in the choir ended in mid-March last year! Nevertheless they are now eligible for membership of the ECA.

We said goodbye to our wonderful organ scholar, Marko Sever, in August. Marko has moved on to a similar post at Westminster Cathedral after two very successful years here. He has been more than adequately replaced by the equally wonderful Dewi Rees, former Westminster Abbey chorister and organ scholar at Jesus College Cambridge under Richard Pinel's guidance. We hope that he will be with us for two academic years and that the second one may give him the experience of a "normal" year here.

It's a great sadness for us that Dean Jeffrey John's farewell services on 14th February can only be online. There will be a Eucharist in the morning at 10 and a diocesan farewell Evensong in the afternoon at 4pm, but again only with a few lay clerks and sopranos singing.



At this stage it is very difficult to predict whether we will return to any semblance of normality for the end of Lent, Holy Week and Easter. In the summer term the IOF, if it goes ahead, will not be featuring large concerts this year nor will the boys and men be going on tour in May as they would normally. Unfortunately until there's more certainty we cannot plan anything that we would normally do, but I'm certain it will all come out alright in the end.

Andrew Lucas

Master of the Music

Congratulations to former members of the Abbey Girls Choir as the 2nd February 2021 marks the 25th Anniversary of their first service.

Member News

As mentioned above, valedictions have only been possible for the Cathedral Girls Choir and we welcome 10 new members: **Joan Alabi, Verity Bowrey, Sedona de Silva, Elizabeth Kennedy, Josie Lawrence, Stephanie Lawrence, Cecily Maxwell, Ella Snailham, Laura Turner and Rebecca Whitehouse.**

From the Cathedral Choir we welcome three new members: **Alex Fenn, Henry Lawrenson and John Ellis Wallace.**

And of course, former Organ Scholar **Marko Sever** is also now a member.

Obituaries

David Radcliffe (chorister from 1960 to 1966) died on 4th July 2020, aged 67. He had a prestigious career with the Hogg Robinson Group, becoming chief executive and then non-executive director of American Express Global Business Travel before retiring in 2018.

Although not a member of our ECA, many of you will recall Rev. Canon **Barney Milligan**, who was Chaplain at St. Albans from 1984 to 1995. He died a couple of weeks ago in Sherbourne aged 93. For more information, see: [St Albans Anglican Chaplaincy, Strasbourg.](#)

Message from the Secretary

January 2021

Your committee has discussed the idea of broadening the content of Alban Notes to include contributions from members who wish to share their stories about how their experiences in the Cathedral choirs has influenced their careers or activities in later life.

We are proud to have in our membership musicians who have gone on to forge careers as professional musicians at the highest level, and developed the excellent musical grounding we all enjoyed in St Albans. But I'm sure a greater number of you have built on the experiences and inspiration from those formative years to take part in music making at a more amateur level.



Maybe you went into music teaching, or composition or research, or used your confidence and expertise to go on to lead a group of other musicians. Maybe you joined the clergy, or even went into architecture; it would be wonderful if you were willing to share such experiences with younger and older ECA members alike in a future issue.

For my part, I caught the so-called "organ bug" whilst a chorister in the 70's, and went on to be apprenticed to the organ builder Peter Collins in Redbourn. Though I did not go into organ building professionally, I was motivated to design and build my own chamber organ in my 30's, and now I'm newly retired in my 60's am able to make some refinements to my "apprentice piece". Here's how it looks today:



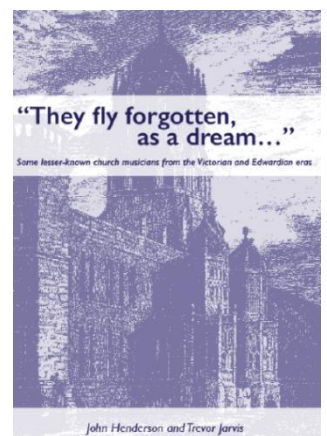
So, I encourage you to feed back with any contributions or ideas for inclusion in future issues of Alban Notes. Contact simon.trott@stalbanseca.org

New Book by Trevor Jarvis Published

The Royal School of Church Music have published a book by their librarians John Henderson and Trevor Jarvis. Trevor was a St Albans chorister from 1956 to 1961 and is a member of the ECA committee.

The book, "*They fly forgotten, as a dream...*", describes the life and times of lesser-known church musicians from the Victorian and Edwardian eras. It includes a mixed-media CD of public domain scores (as PDFs) and over four hours of recorded organ music (mp3 format).

More details can be found on the [RSCM Shop website](#) and can be purchased from the site for £28.



2021 Yearbook

Our 2020 Yearbook is still being prepared for publication but will now be our **2021 Yearbook!** Please could I urge all members to review their member record on our website and advise of any updates or amendments by the end of February. 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. A recent addition to our social media profile is that of our very own Twitter account. Please feel free to follow, like, re-tweet and comment, or just keep up to date [@StAlbansECA](#).

Dates for the Diary

Wednesday 17th February 2021 *Ash Wednesday - **CANCELLED***

Obviously, due to the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic, we won't be able to sing for the Ash Wednesday service this year - let's hope that we can next year.

3rd – 5th September 2021 *Weekend in Luccombe*

We still hope a visit to Luccombe, at the request of the Hurford family, with Choral Evensong in memory of Peter, will go ahead this year. The weekend was postponed last year and we hope not to have to postpone again. Your committee continues to review Government guidelines and will take all aspects of the weekend, including attendees and residents views into consideration, before making a decision in the coming months.

