



# 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 53 Spring Term 2022

## Message from the President

It is a great pleasure to write this introduction to *Alban Notes* as your new President, a huge honour for me and a wonderful opportunity to rekindle my connections with St. Albans Abbey, where I spent so many happy years. I hope you will forgive me for some personal reflections. Those who know me well are aware of my admiration for the poetry of W.H. Auden, whom I often saw in my undergraduate years as organ scholar at Christ Church, Oxford. Of all the expressions I find most evocative of what it means to have a vocation, this extract from a poem by him from his *Horae Canonicae* is particularly compelling:



**Dr Stephen Darlington**  
President

*You need not see what someone is doing  
to know if it is his vocation,*

*you have only to watch his eyes:  
a cook mixing a sauce, a surgeon*

*making a primary incision,  
a clerk completing a bill of lading,*

*wear the same rapt expression,  
forgetting themselves in a function.*

*How beautiful it is,  
that eye-on-the-object look.*

This 'forgetting themselves in a function' has been one of the delights of my career in cathedral music: it has been there in performance, in the choir stalls, in the playing and singing and in the tutorials and lectures. All of you who have been connected with the Abbey choirs will recognise this precious feeling of being entirely focussed in service of music in the liturgy. This living tradition has been fostered in St. Albans with huge success, and in the wider field of cathedral music, it is essential that it continues to flourish.

I am often asked to reminisce about my St. Albans days, but the highlights are too numerous to include in an article of this length. In 1978, I was fortunate (and somewhat daunted) to be appointed as Master of the Music following in the steps of Peter Hurford, one of the most brilliant musicians I have encountered. The Dean, Peter Moore, was an exceptional man, a more than competent musician who really cared about music in worship, but also a maverick: perhaps that is why he appointed me! This wonderful Cathedral provided me with a perfect environment to explore liturgical music of all types and continue Peter Hurford's outstanding tradition. I worked



with tremendous singers young and old, and a brilliant colleague Andrew Parnell. Everyone seemed to relish the breadth of music we performed.

Speaking of which, I was lecturing to the Elgar Society recently and it reminded me of another highlight. I had occasion to use excerpts from a 1983 St. Albans recording, which was Nicholas Kenyon's Classical Record of the Month (no CDs then!) in the Sunday Times. The excellent discography from St. Albans, starting under Peter Hurford continues to reach amazing heights in the present day. Recordings, radio and television performances were certainly highlights for me as was a visit by the Queen, commissioning new music including Judith Weir's anthem *Ascending into heaven*, exploring lesser-known repertoire in liturgical context such as masses by Fayrfax, Frank Martin and Duruflé, plus of course, the choir camps, choir cricket matches and other lively social events. But not surprisingly, some of the most satisfying personal musical highlights appeared unexpectedly in the context of cathedral services, when an intangible dimension would sometimes enter into the music-making, transcending verbal description.

It is self-evidently the case that music has the power to evoke profound spiritual responses in people: sacred choral music is probably more widely disseminated now than at any stage in history. So, what of the future of cathedral music? Nationally the general standard has risen hugely during my lifetime, and the awareness of choral music is more widespread than ever. However, financial constraints are bringing pressure to bear on all aspects of the ministry of cathedrals, and of course, music is an obvious target when institutions face difficult financial decisions. This has been particularly evident during the current pandemic, and as chairman of the Ouseley Church Music Trust, I was glad to be involved with other charities in setting up a Cathedral Choirs' Emergency Fund last year. £1 million was distributed to keep cathedral music departments from collapse. The process highlighted how crucial it is for cathedral clergy to recognise how music can act as a spiritual conduit for worshippers of all ages in a powerful and unique way. This is clearly the case in St. Albans and long may it continue.

I am sure you will be inspired by reading this edition of *Alban Notes*. At the risk of overstating my case, I have more poetry by W.H. Auden to recommend as you absorb the latest news from our contributors. In his Christmas Oratorio, entitled *For the Time Being*, there is a reflective 'Chorale' which was set to music by Benjamin Britten and more recently by Robert Saxton. The final stanza is a sort of prayer as well as a cry for action. The last two lines present a particularly pertinent message for the current national crisis, but the final three words in particular, 'Adventure, Art, and Peace', have always resonated with me. They provide a perfect final cadence to my introductory reflections, encapsulating as they do the vocation of St. Albans Abbey ex-choristers, young and old.

*Inflict Thy promises with each  
Occasion of distress,  
That from our incoherence we  
May learn to put our trust in Thee,  
And brutal fact persuade us to  
Adventure, Art, and Peace.*

**Stephen Darlington**  
President

## Choir News

*From September 2021*

At last the cathedral choirs have been singing at full strength in the both the Quire and Nave.

We started having all the Lay Clerks singing from the final Sunday of the first half term, which allowed us to be at full strength for **David Martin-Smith's** valediction from the choir after 35 years of continuous service as a tenor Lay Clerk. David and his wife, Stephanie, moved the following week to live in Scotland though we may see them back from time to time. At first we still observed some distancing between singers, resulting in an unusual layout of singers in both the Nave and the Quire and the congregation was still required to be mute in the hymns and other parts of the services they would normally sing, but since the start of this term we are 'back to normal', occupying our traditional places in the stalls and congregational singing has resumed. It's also been very good to have the Abbey Singers and Parish Singers back singing, though for the latter some distancing is still being observed to allow those feeling vulnerable to take part again.

In the summer term the cathedral did a reduced version of Albantide with the pilgrimage on a Sunday, at which both the boys and girls choirs sang. We ended term in July with the customary Valedictions (for the boys covering two academic years). During the summer we also resumed our public organ recital series (Wednesday lunchtimes and Sunday afternoons).

In all this time for both of the choirs, the number of children coming forward to audition to be probationers has been encouraging with both choirs feeling like they are up to full strength in terms of numbers. Unfortunately, the start of the boys' term has been stricken by colds and other ailments as various viruses and infections have rejoiced in our returning to normal distancing, but so far we have not had an outbreak of Covid.

This term [Autumn 2021] the music department is operating more as normal, with the children using the Chapter House Song School as their base. At normal times this room has always felt tight for space when the boys or girls and the Lay Clerks rehearse in there. At the moment we still don't feel that it would be wise to hold full rehearsals there, though I hope that as time goes on it will become possible. We are planning for a normal Autumn term with all the usual extra services (Civic, Justice, All Souls, Remembrance, and Advent and Christmas carol services). Also, at long last, the Parish Orchestra has reconvened for its monthly appearance at the Parish Eucharist.

**Andrew Lucas**

*Master of the Music*

## Member News

We welcome nine new members, seven valedicted last July: **Ben Gardner, Georgia McGrory, William Mauldridge, Avah Quak-Winslow, Kaspar Van Rooijen-Din, Matthew Seera** and **Eliza de Silva**, and two this January 2022: **Nathan Beetlestone** and **Alexander Crook**.

## Obituary

**Peter Pearson** (Bass Lay Clerk 1959 to 1987)



*RIP Peter Pearson (1927 to 2022)*

It is with sadness that we register the passing in the new year of former Lay Clerk and 'Camp Master' **Peter Pearson**, at the age of 94. The Association extends our gratitude and condolences to his widow Kay, and daughters Jenny, Rebecca, Juliet and Wendy.

Peter joined the choir as a tenor Lay Clerk in the early months of Peter Hurford's time as Master of the Music, and was quickly also recruited to the important role of Camp Master at the annual summer choir camps in Luccombe. Beyond his singing talents as a choir member he impressed colleagues his insistence on the correct posture and smooth gait in procession, seeming to be moving on castors. He also impressed as a talented flute and recorder player and with the associated breath control which translated to his singing.

He continued as a Lay Clerk on the bass line under Stephen Darlington and Colin Walsh until March 1987 when he retired from the Abbey choir, but continued his choral singing with The Wingrave Singers, Carillon, regularly with the Choir of St Francis' Church Welwyn Garden City, and occasionally with the Fayrfax Consort.

During his working life Peter was a teacher specialising in craft and woodwork. He was also a keen hockey player, continuing to play long after his retirement.

Many ex-choristers will remember Peter for his Sergeant Major styled authority and even-handed discipline in managing all the day to day essentials of camp life. Some of us may remember being awakened by his rendition on the flute of Reveillez outside their tents some mornings, or by a raucous 'WAKEY WAKEY!', presumably the origin of his affectionate nickname 'Thunderguts'. And let's not forget the strict daily tent inspections.

Many tributes from choir colleagues have reached my inbox, praising Peter for his 'dry' humour, modesty and strong motivation to be the best he could possibly be in all aspects of his life.

Readers can learn more about life at choir camp in Peter's own words on page 10 of the ECA's 2021 Yearbook (which can be downloaded from the [ECA website](http://www.StAlbansECA.org)), as well as a photo of him on page 9, robed, in a choir photo in 1971 (2nd from the right in the front row of the gentlemen).

**Simon T Trott**

*Secretary*

## Peter Hurford Memorial Weekend in Luccombe

### 2nd to 4th September 2022

After two years of postponements, I am pleased to announce to ECA members that planning is going ahead for the special memorial weekend to commemorate Peter Hurford's links to Luccombe through many years of the annual summer choir camp.

Events are being planned from Friday 2nd to Sunday 4th September in and around Luccombe. We hope to arrange an indoor reception on the Friday afternoon for people travelling to the area. It is expected that members will want to arrange a variety of outdoor activities on the Saturday (e.g. Dunkery Beacon, Porlock Bay and Porlock Weir, West Somerset Railway), and a 'get-together' event on the Saturday evening with food. Facilities will be made available for those wishing to camp, or bring a caravan or camper van. A detailed program of events will be issued in due course.

The high point of the weekend will be a choral Evensong in St Mary's church on Sunday afternoon at 3 p.m., followed by refreshments in the village hall provided by the village community. During the service, we hope to be able to unveil a memorial plaque to Peter in church, mounted near the organ.

Please could I ask any members who are interested in attending to let me know numbers *as soon as possible* to assist with the details of the planning.



*Church of St Mary, Luccombe*

Please could I ask you to reply to me at [simon.trott@stalbanseca.org](mailto:simon.trott@stalbanseca.org), and indicate if you are:

- a) definite / undecided,
- b) expecting to be present for the whole weekend, or for just a part,
- c) camping / caravanning or expecting to arrange your own accommodation,
- d) willing to join the Exquire group to sing at the service, including a practice on the Sunday morning. Please indicate what voice part you sing: A, T or B?

We would like to thank the Luccombe PCC and villagers for their enthusiasm for this event to go ahead, and we look forward to an enjoyable and memorable weekend.



## Other News



*Alex and Laura with Charlie*

### A New Addition for Two Ex-Choristers

Congratulations to **Alex Johnston** (CC 1997 to 2003) and **Laura Hicks** (AGC 1997 to 2003) as they welcomed their baby Charlie into the world on 16th November 2021.

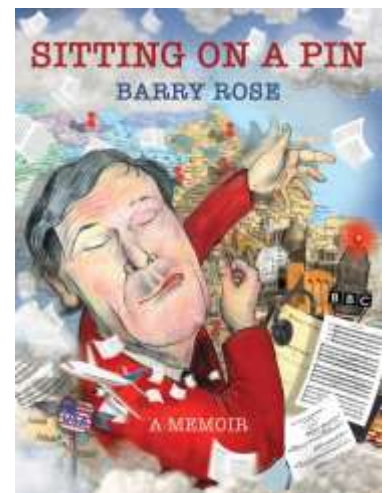
We believe this may be the first baby of two ex-choristers so no doubt a great choral future awaits him!

### Memoirs Published of a Former Master of the Music

Members may be interested in former Master of the Music and ECA Vice President **Dr Barry Rose**'s memoirs, titled "Sitting On A Pin", in which he writes a great deal about his time at St Albans.

The cover of the book (right) was designed by former Lay Clerk **Simon Blake** (Alto 1987 to 1991), who is now a professional artist. The design is based around a caricature that he did of the then MoM during a Friday evening choir practice. Ex-choristers and Lay Clerks (past and present), may well recognise the 'pose'!

Copies of the book are available from the publishers (YPD Books) - [link here](#) or from Amazon- [link here](#). Barry has also kindly offered personally signed copies. Email the ECA - [info@stalbanseca.org](mailto:info@stalbanseca.org) - and we will send details on how to obtain a copy directly.



*Cover of Dr Barry Rose's memoirs*

### St Albans has a new Dean

In December, we welcomed a new Dean at St Albans. The **Very Reverend Jo Kelly-Moore** was installed on the 4<sup>th</sup> December 2021. See the item on the [cathedral website](#).

### Former St Albans Sub Dean Stephen Lake to be Bishop of Salisbury

Members will, I'm sure, remember fondly our former Sub Dean who served in St Albans from 2001 to 2011. He went on to be Dean of Gloucester and has now been approved as the next Bishop of Salisbury. We offer our congratulations and best wishes to him and his family. See [Diocese of Salisbury website](#).

## ECA Website - Facebook - Twitter

We hope you are familiar with our website ([StAlbansECA.org](http://StAlbansECA.org)) and we are also have a [Facebook page](#) and a Twitter account [@StAlbansECA](#).

## Dates for the Diary

**2nd to 4th September 2022** *Peter Hurford Memorial Weekend in Luccombe*

