



Friends of Cathedral Music

Hereford Diocesan Newsletter

August/September 2018

Safeguarding a priceless heritage

A Reminder: Date of next Local Gathering in Hereford



22 September 2018

There will be a local diocesan gathering at Hereford on Saturday 22 September. Geraint Bowen, Artistic Director of this year's festival, will talk about the Three Choirs Festival, and there will be tours of the Song School and the Cathedral gardens. We shall finish with tea and evensong. Please see the separate booking form for further details and do bring a friend – they might become members of FCM!

Visit to the Vatican

In the last newsletter we mentioned the honour that the cathedral choir had received in being the first Anglican cathedral choir to be invited to sing at the Papal Mass on the Feast of Sts Peter and Paul in St Peter's Square, as well, as being invited to sing in a concert in the Sistine Chapel before the Pope and the ambassadors to the Holy See with the Sistine Chapel Choir. We are grateful to Ioan O'Reilly, one of the choristers, for writing his account of this momentous visit, which follows below. The service can be seen on YouTube, accessed via the Cathedral website.

Rome Trip – 2018

This has been an amazing year for the choir; with performances attended by members of the Royal family and a home Three Choirs Festival! Yet by far the most exciting and exotic part of the year was the choir's trip to Rome...

The choir set out on its travels on Tuesday, 26th June, and in no time at all the fun of the trip had started when the organ scholar forgot his lunch (and upon realising that it was still in his fridge quickly sprinted off). Our flight was, as predicted by Mr Bowen, late. Then, after a long flight, we arrived in Fiumicino Airport, Rome. We had a sing-song on the bus from the airport to the hotel and hastily ate some food (naturally pizza).

The next day we had a quick breakfast and were 'transferred by coach' to the Vatican. On the way one chorister exclaimed that he had seen the Basilica first. What he had seen, however, was the dome of a small church. He had missed the massive basilica dome, which was right behind him!

On arrival we were shown into a *small* "side chapel": it was the size of Hereford's Catholic Church. We also met some of the choristers of "La Cappella la Sistina"- the Sistine Chapel choir. I was informed by one that he only spoke English "*Un poco*"; from this I drew my conclusions. However, his English was much better than my Italian. We then rehearsed with the 'Maestro'! The Maestro's heart, however, seemed set on one thing – to sing *pianissimo*. I and the other Hereford

choristers were puzzled by this: 'Why and how does the conductor expect us to fill the Sistine Chapel and St Peter's Square with sound whilst singing *pianissimo*?!!'

After the rehearsal we went to the residence of the British Ambassador to the Pope. We had tea on the balcony, giving us a lovely view of Rome. It was a complete panoramic view of the city stretching into the foothills of a mountain range. The view was picturesque and the tea was lovely but short lived, and soon we had to be 'transferred by coach' back to the Vatican. It was then that the choir of Hereford Cathedral saw a sight they would never forget... the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel; possibly Michelangelo's greatest work!!!

At the bottom of the stairway leading up to the Hallway outside the Sistine we were reminded by Mr Bowen that 'you can only go into the Sistine Chapel FOR THE FIRST TIME once'. Such was our consequent state of expectation that some of the choristers thought that the hallway outside the Sistine was actually the chapel itself... but when we reached the Sistine Chapel itself, it certainly was beautiful; and a marvellous sight!



The next day was spent sightseeing (and eating ice-cream). Rome is a wonderful city filled with history and ice cream shops; every time you turn a corner there is something famous to be seen. We saw a great number of Catholic churches (and found the Anglican church as well); the former were filled with more gold leaf and frescos than seemed possible. We saw the Trevi Fountain, and took water from the refill stations. Interestingly in Rome they have constant freshwater so you can fill your water bottle for free, and the water is quite tasty.



We breakfasted early the next day before taking the coach to the Vatican. It was St Peter's Day (and St Paul's Day) and so the Vatican was holding massive festivities. It was a public holiday in Rome and people had arrived at St Peter's Square at the crack of dawn. We had been invited to sing at the Papal Mass – a mass attended by the Pope himself. Around 125,000 people were crammed into the square; that's roughly the population of

Herefordshire! But we couldn't see the crowds so the nerves didn't get to us. In fact, we were stationed under the portico.

We found the Mass very hard to follow, particularly as the 'Maestro' kept changing the music. Firstly, we scrapped one piece, then another, and then he asked us if we had a copy of a piece of music we weren't told to bring! It was completely crazy; but the Mass went very well nevertheless. In fact, it was great, absolutely great!

After the Mass (which was all in Latin save for a few passages of English, Mandarin and Arabic) we walked out into the Vatican Gardens. Now, the Italian choristers could not seem able to pronounce my name, but luckily there was a list of Popes nearby; I pointed at '*IOANNES*' and received triumphant shouts of '*Giovanni, Giovanni!!!*'. That is my name in Italian.

Then we met the Pope, he arrived in a black/blue Ford (the model of which was the subject for much discussion in our camp). This was slightly underwhelming; after all we were expecting a very nice *WHITE* car. He said "Hello" and "Well done" before having his photo taken with us. It was to become the iconic photo of the trip. I still cannot get over the fact we have met the POPE!!!



When the phenomenon ended we all went back to the 'vestry', a small room which the choir used as a base in the Vatican. This was where we unrobed and relaxed. Then we crossed into a decorated hall; decked with portraits of Popes. This was where we would have lunch. It was here I met Federico, Fabricio, Alberto and Filippo. Filippo had learnt that I was 'Giovanni' and gave me a quick introduction to all the choristers (and there are an awful lot of them) in the Sistine Chapel Choir. I met Federico (Filippo's best friend), Fabricio (a younger chorister) and Alberto (who called me 'Porto' all the time). Then the Dean made a short but witty (Google-Translate aided) speech and Mr Bowen presented the 'Maestro' with a few "tokens of appreciation". However, the time came for us to part from our Italian colleagues and set off back to the hotel for more sightseeing.

After seeing the Colosseum, travelling on the Metro and looking at some amazing churches (one containing St Valentine's skull – apparently?!!) we went back to the hotel. We had pizza and set off to the Castel Sant' Angelo to watch the annual fireworks display. When they appeared to come from a different location, we found we were in the wrong place. The display was being held instead in the Piazza del Popolo.



Ioan O'Reilly in the Forum

On the final day we went sightseeing again – there is so much to see – and went to San Clemente, a church situated on top of an old church which in turn is on top of a cult shrine. We also visited the Forum, the Ancient Roman marketplace where the Temples were situated.

As the morning drew to a close, we all congregated in the hotel lobby for one last meal in Italy. There was pasta and pizza, olive oil and tomatoes. It was a fitting meal to end a wonderful trip to Rome. We then left the hotel and travelled to the airport.

Once at Fiumicino we separated into our groups, booked in and snaked our way through the long lines of duty free zones. Suddenly a massive roar went up. It was the dense crowd of football fans watching France v. Argentina in the World Cup.

We boarded our plane and set off back home. From the plane you could see a whole multitude of marvels as we passed over the Mediterranean Sea, the Alps, France and the English Channel.

A mere five days from when we set out we arrived back at Hereford, travel weary and dazed but with enough memories to last a lifetime.

Ioan O'Reilly
Chorister at Hereford Cathedral

While this account is a lively testament to the exceptional opportunities that a choir-school education offers, it is pleasing to report in the two items below that church music flourishes elsewhere, both in Hereford's own Sixth-Form College and across the Atlantic.

Academia Musica

Academia Musica, a corporate member of FCM, regularly sings evensong in the cathedral on Wednesdays in term time and their Director, Jon Weller, has sent this report on the choir's recent and future activities:

Academia Musica Choir, the scholars' choir based at Hereford Sixth Form College, continues its exciting and unique programme this coming year. Highlights of the latter part of last year included the choir singing the final evensong of the Three Choirs Festival in Hereford Cathedral, preceded a week earlier by the soprano scholars making up half of the female chorus in Holst's Planet Suite, with the Philharmonia Orchestra, conducted by inspirational young conductor, Elim Chan.

Next academic year sees the choir continue to sing Choral Evensong most term-time Wednesdays in Hereford Cathedral. One of these will be conducted by former Hereford chorister, Tim Noon (now Director of Music at Exeter Cathedral). In addition to regular evensongs in Hereford, the choir will sing joint evensongs in Oxford with two of the country's finest collegiate choirs - Queen's College and Merton College in January - and also in Worcester Cathedral next April. The link with Merton College, Oxford has been strengthened with the news that Academia Musica alumna, Aine Smith, is to become a choral scholar at Merton next academic year, joining Will Thomson, another former scholar with Academia.

The choir is delighted to continue their partnership with the English Symphony Orchestra, and will sing Handel's *Messiah* in Malvern Priory and Bach's *Magnificat* in Hereford's Shire Hall in December and next April respectively. December 2018 also includes a concert for the choir in Leominster alongside Herefordshire Youth Choir, performing Tippett's *Child of our Time* spirituals

and Carl Davis's *Last Train to Tomorrow* (commemorating the 80th anniversary of Kindertransport), both pieces conducted by Carl Davis.

The choir will conclude their academic year's programme with a tour to the Scottish capital of Edinburgh, with a programme of concerts, evensongs and recitals across the city.

With scholar numbers higher than ever and, with some exciting programmes ahead, the future is very bright for this talented, young choir.

An American Visit

In mid-August the cathedral was delighted to welcome the combined Adult Choir and Children's Choir of The Choir School of Newport County, Rhode Island, directed by Peter Stoltzfus Berton. Peter had invited Dr Barry Rose to conduct and train the choir, and the sensitively phrased singing of the psalms (the real test of a choir!) gave evidence of his skilful training. But the choir also gave spirited accounts of such services as Murrill in E and Bairstow in D, as well as a fine performance of Barry Rose's own communion motet, 'Here, O my Lord', which the composer modestly dismissed as 'a little thing', but which was beautiful.



The choir also sang the verses of the hymn, 'Hereford', at various points in Peter Berton's own *Hereford Variations*, a set of variations for the organ inspired by Tom Denny's Traherne windows. The sopranos sang the first verse 'seraphic-wise' from up in the tower. The whole work was warmly received by a substantial audience, and afterwards the choir went out to Credenhill to hear more about Thomas Traherne and to share the view he enjoyed from outside his church, looking out across the fields to the Black Mountains.

The choirs of St John the Evangelist, Newport County, Rhode Island with their guest conductor, Dr Barry Rose.

And finally...

If you have received a paper copy of this newsletter, please consider saving the FCM the cost of postage and envelopes by letting us have your email address (we will never share it) so that we can email it to you next time.

Pictures: With thanks to the Cathedral Archives, Helen and Ioan O'Reilly and Peter Berton.