

WELLS CATHEDRAL VOLUNTARY CHOIR

President Lady Gass DCVO
Director of Music Michael Cockerham
Organist Matthew Redman
Chair Charly Dando

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Michael's thoughts

As the Voluntary Choir moves into its 34th year, and as its Director my 23rd, I sense a renewed feeling amongst the singers of support for its pending transition as I plan to retire in July, notwithstanding my unforeseen absence as of now. I sense, too, stability and commitment are the products of, above all friendship and a striving for the common good in performance, perhaps to re-inforce a double ration of holiness following what St Augustine is believed to have said: "Qui canit bis orat".

There is currently a great deal of extra management of the Choir's position and schedule, and for this we must all pay our warmest thanks to the Committee, so assiduously chaired by Charly Dando and managed so cordially and graciously on a practical level by Kath Bristow. At Wells, we are fortunate to have "in the wings" an extensive array of willing and gifted professional musicians, and while I am away from my place between the choir stalls, we are grateful to have the input of Dave Stevens, Matthew Redman, Stephen Bell, and others interested and willing, if not always available, to step in and help maintain the Voly Choir's much-valued contribution to the ceaseless order of cathedral worship. I thank them all.

Sara ROWE (nee NAPPER) 31st March 1953 - 11th October 2019

Sara was brought up in Buckinghamshire and educated at St Bernard's Convent School. She met Keith through St Mary Langley Parish Choir. When they married in 1973 Sara was studying for a law degree in London whilst Keith was working in computers for a merchant bank in the City. Their four daughters Kate, Penny, Polly and Ephie were all born in Buckinghamshire.

In 1990 they decided to escape to the country and moved to Wookey. Keith joined the Voluntary Choir in January 1991 and the family moved to 38 Chamberlain Street in the summer of that year. Sara joined the choir in November 1992 but Keith took time out between July 1993 and November 1995. Sara had a few months off in 1994 after the birth of their only son, Edward. On her return she soon became a stalwart of the decani altos. Keith became our principal Cantor in September 2001 after Brian Garrard went to Sark.

Sara appeared to take everything in her stride, never giving the appearance of being flustered and was a typical example of "If you want something done, ask a busy person". Having educated four of their children at the Cathedral School she helped in the Junior School boarding house for a few years before working for *Harris and Harris*, solicitors, where she looked after the diocesan registry work. For the twinning association she put up French teachers who came with their pupils to Wells each year.

Turning down offers of help, Keith and Sara hosted lunch for the choir on the Sunday after Christmas for a number of years giving us many relaxed, congenial occasions between services. In 2008 they hosted as usual and I remember thinking how unwell Keith looked but he was not diagnosed with cancer until it was very advanced and he died less than a month later on 26th January 2009. That year continued to be incredibly difficult for Sara with the loss of her mother, her father, her best friend Marian and others. She became perilously close to giving up Choir finding it so difficult without Keith.

One of the most moving events of the choir's year was when Keith used to sing the verse sections of the Advent Prose during the Sunday evensongs in December. Processing from the quire, down the north quire aisle, around the Lady Chapel, up the south choir aisle and back into the stalls, a very

special atmosphere was created in the gloom of those dark evenings as the sound echoed around the still cathedral. In 2010 Sara and Charly Dando took on Keith's role and I think of that as being one of Sara's most telling singing contributions – it was hauntingly beautiful.

Having problems with a lack of feeling in her feet, Sara gave up driving about five years ago but typically made light of it declaring that she had her home, work, shops and the cathedral all in walking distance.

In March 2016 Sara was persuaded to take on the role of Chairman of the choir. We were very fortunate. She had a comprehensive knowledge of how things worked in the cathedral (in her time with the choir she had watched several generations of changes of chapter). She was good at quietly managing her committee, well-balanced in her views, considered, with plenty of common sense, always calm but never weak.

A friend of Keith and Sara's left the choir a bequest which was totally unexpected but much appreciated.

Sara disliked having her photo taken but this one was snatched by Brian Garrard at our Southwell residence in 2018



Once Sara's cancer was diagnosed, she was so brave. She came to Chester with us in August singing several services, pacing herself by having a couple of nights mid-week away in Llandudno. She even came to a few rehearsals in September. She is sorely missed, of course by her family, but also by us. Thank you Sara for your friendship and all you did for Wells CVC. ALB

Future Services for the Voly Choir 2020

Sun	Feb 9 th	Evensong with Cath Choir And other Local Choirs Celebration of Vol in Somerset	3.00pm
Sat	Feb 15 th	Evensong	5.15pm
Sun	Feb 16 th	Eucharist	9.45am
		Matins	11.30am
		Evensong	3.00pm
Mon	Mar 16 th	Open Door Service	
Sat	Mar 28 th	Evensong	5.15pm
Sun	Mar 29 th	Eucharist	9.45am
		Matins	11.30am
		Evensong	3.00pm
Sat	Apr 4 th	Evensong	5.15pm
Sat	May 30 th	Evensong	5.15pm
Sun	May 31 st	Eucharist	9.45am
		Matins	11.30am
		Evensong	3.00pm
Sat	Jun 20 th	Diocesan Choral Festival	
Thurs	Jul 9 th	Evensong	5.15pm
Sun	Jul 14 th	Eucharist/Evensong Bath Abbey	

Membership

Bob Price (Bass) has decided to retire from the Choir owing to health reasons. We would like to thank Bob for his service to the Choir over a number of years and will miss his deep notes! We also welcome a new member Colin Bretherton (Bass).

Where have we been singing?

On Oct we sang Evensong at St Michael's Yeovil. St Michael's is a Victorian Church built in 1895-7 by J Nicholson Johnston of Yeovil to serve the Pen Mill area of Yeovil. For the Service we sang for the

Introit 'Be still for the presence of the Lord' arr by Michael Cockerham, Clucas Responses, Wood Evening Service in E flat No 2 and 'Lead kindly light' by Frikki Walker.

On Oct 29th we sang for Sara's Memorial Service in the Cathedral. We sang as an introit 'Be still' arr by Michael, Psalm 122, 'Bleib' bei uns' by Rheinberger, 'Let all the world' by Ralph Vaughan Williams and 'Nunc Dimittis' from Brewer in D Evening Service.

On Nov 18th we sang 'Gaelic Blessing' by John Rutter with the Cathedral Choir and local choirs for the Evensong supporting 'Singing for Syrians' as part of a nationwide campaign from the 'Hands Up Foundation'.

On Dec 7th we sang for the wedding of Pierre and Sarah at Holy Trinity, High Littleton. We sang 'Apres un Reve' by Gabriel Faure, 'Sing Joyfully' by William Bryd and 'If ye love me' by Thomas Tallis.

Assoc of Cathedral Voluntary Choirs Festival at Rochester Cathedral



A fine sunny autumnal weekend greeted those participants in the Association of Cathedral Voluntary Choirs meeting at Rochester on 19th – 20th October. A total of 60 singers took part in the event, but it should be pointed out that half this number were from the host choir. With 13 representatives from Wells (plus camp supporters), we were probably the largest visiting contingent, as some of the other 7 visiting choirs had only a couple of representatives present. Rochester last hosted the event in October 2004 when there were considerably more visiting singers, nevertheless this year's event was obviously a major occasion in the Cathedral's calendar.

A recently published volume on English Cathedrals describes the scene of our weekend's activity. "As we crest the hill on the road from London, we glimpse below us a Norman keep, bulky and sinister, crouching over an adjacent steeple like a cat waiting to pounce. The town is a sad place. The north Kent coast should be a natural wilderness or at least a picturesque suburb. Instead, it is a wasteland of half used wharves, warehouses and refineries, dotted with random housing estates. But the old high street survives (with many coffee houses), as does the enclave round what remains the largest Norman keep in England".

It is customary for WVCV attendees at such weekends to make their own accommodation arrangements and Rochester was no exception, with 6 different venues being used. Most Wells members travelled up to the South East on the Friday, which Maggie and myself found beneficial. Completely by chance, we arrived at exactly the same time at the Premier Inn, as did Della and Mike which was a lovely surprise, since we had no idea that they were using the same hotel. As the Premier Inn is located a couple of miles outside the city, overlooking the River Medway we were able to lift share into the Cathedral, which simplified travelling arrangements, for the two non choristers.

Certain aspects of our visit were extremely well organised by the Rochester members and management of the weekend parking arrangements was superb, as was the registration procedure for choristers. Having looked around the town and rendezvoused with a long-standing friend from the Guildford Choir during the morning, at midday we were entertained by a conducted tour of the Cathedral. The guide identified herself as one of the Rochester CVC Sopranos who had also arranged the evening dinner.

Seating arrangements at such events can often be difficult and the organisers had placed the entire “home team” in front of the “away team” who were largely situated on a rising platform, thereby creating something of a barrier. This was the terminology used by conductor, Douglas Henn-Macrae which I am aware that some visitors found unacceptable. For some unknown reason, Douglas did not use a microphone which made it impossible to hear him at times, for those sat at the rear of the choir. Having rehearsed from 2pm to 4pm with a short comfort break, it was time for a cup of tea before a quick photo shoot. Evensong followed at 5pm with the singing of William Harris’s “Behold the Tabernacle” as an introit. We then sang Richard Lloyd’s Salisbury Canticles for the first time with organ accompaniment, this proved less challenging than at our own rehearsals. It was followed by Hubert Parry’s extended anthem “Hear my words” which was clearly chosen to feature the “home team’s” vocal talents, since the “away team” were designated to listen to at least 50% of the piece, whilst providing a solid backing support in the double choir passages. Nevertheless the Baritone soloist had a particularly fine voice which made agreeable listening.

The evening dinner event was held at St Justus Church Hall, it’s location some 2 miles out of the city and a 10 minute drive from the Cathedral proved challenging for some of the visiting delegates in the dark! We were treated to a 3 course meal which was provided by local caterers and all singers were encouraged to sit on different tables to their fellow choir members. There appeared to be an abundance of wine on the tables which I’m afraid was no use to me or my fellow drivers! We were entertained by after dinner speaker, Chris Royall a former Rochester chorister, and more lately a counter tenor in The Sixteen who described his singing experiences over the past 50 years and his association with our own “MC”!

On the Sunday morning we reassembled to practice at 9am more familiar Eucharistic music with the setting being Darke in E, followed by a typical Sumsion motet “O Salutaris hostia”. Both these pieces along with the Lloyd Salisbury Service we will have used at Wells during December – ACVC can be said to broaden our repertoire!

At approximately midday the Eucharist, which had been sensitively accompanied by the new Rochester Cathedral organist, Francesca Massey, concluded. Having said our good-byes, and returned our badges, we all returned at different times to the West Country, tired but satisfied with our achievements.

Peter & Maggie Curtin

Summer Residency 2020

This year’s Summer Residency is at Hereford Cathedral from Mon Aug 3rd to Sun Aug 9th.

Thanks to Lynne Browning for the tribute to Sara and to Peter and Maggie Curtin for the article on ACVC.

Cathedral News

We would like to welcome Canon Rob James as our new Chancellor. Rob has moved across the Severn Estuary from Newnham-on Severn. We would also like to congratulate Jeremy Cole on becoming the new Director of Music at the Cathedral.