



ONCE A CHORISTER

Federation of Cathedral Old Choristers' Associations



2025 Edition

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Ayrton Westwood (*Norwich*)

Vice Presidents

Geoffrey Mitchell

Dr Barry Rose OBE

Ian Henderson

David Horwood

Carl Jackson MVO

Nick Hodges (*Warwick*)

Alastair Pollard (*Durham*)

Michael Lake (*Chelmsford*)

Richard Watts (*Westminster Abbey*)

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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Nick Hodges (*Warwick*) (Outgoing)

Samuel Barber (*Peterborough*) (from October 2025)
chairman@fcoca.org.uk

Vice Chairman

Vacant

Honorary Secretary

Alastair Pollard (*Durham*) (Outgoing)

Oliver Hamilton-Box (*Peterborough*) (from October 2025)
secretary@fcoca.org.uk

Honorary Treasurer

Michael Lake (*Chelmsford*) (Outgoing)

Bradley Odep (*Peterborough*) (from October 2025)
treasurer@fcoca.org.uk

Membership Secretary

Richard Lilley (*St Albans*)

membership@fcoca.org.uk

Website Officer

Richard Watts (*Westminster Abbey*)

REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVES

North & Ireland

Alastair Pollard (*Durham*)

Midshires and Wales

Nick Hodges (*Warwick*)

South West

Stephen Milner (*Salisbury*)

East Anglia and South East

Ayrton Westwood (*Norwich*)

OAC Editor: Aaron Shilson



FROM THE EDITOR

It is my pleasure to welcome you this 2025 edition of the Once A Chorister magazine.

In my first written piece as editor, I thought it might be prudent to introduce myself, and I'm afraid I must begin with a confession:

I was **not** a chorister.

Alas, my exposure to choral music didn't begin in earnest until my time at secondary school - no sooner had I given one half-decent rendition of 'In the bleak midwinter' and my tenure as a treble was over. Suffice to say that the damage was done, and the addiction had taken hold, and 20 years later I am still happily involved in the world of church music.

Whilst I've not experienced choristership 'first hand', my work allows me the privilege to observe every day the benefits that being a chorister affords our young people. I understand that I am preaching to the choir (apologies) when I say it is abundantly clear that these benefits are not limited to musical education, or those 'transferable skills' that are so useful through all walks of life. They also include the connections made whilst a chorister, be they with peers, predecessors, or the institutions we serve, these connections can define a lifetime, and it is these connections that Once A Chorister seeks to nurture and encourage beyond choristership.

The importance of this work is clear to anyone who has attended a local reunion or OaC festival. It was at the 2024 festival, held on 'home turf' at Llandaff Cathedral, where I became convinced of this importance, and so I was saddened to learn of the challenges facing OaC, and the idea of an Old Chorister Association in general. Without trying to sound too virtuous, I wanted to help, and so I was very pleased when Alastair accepted my offer to fill the soon to be vacant role of editor.

I hope that in this issue you will find that the feelings of uncertainty that were present in the previous edition have given way to optimism, and that you will rest assured that even though there are many changes on the horizon, the aims and objectives of Once A Chorister remain the same.

I personally look forward to the work of continuing the legacy of this publication and, with you, watching eagerly as a new era of Once A Chorister's history unfolds.

With very best wishes,

Aaron Shilson
Editor

Member Associations

Blackburn Cathedral Choirs Association
 Cambridge, King's College Old Choristers' Association
 Cambridge, The Choir Association of St John's College
 Canterbury Cathedral Old Choristers' Association
 Chelmsford Cathedral Old Choristers' Association
 Chester Cathedral Choristers' Association
 Chichester Cathedral Choristers' Association
 Christchurch Cathedral, NZ, Choir Society
 Dublin, Christchurch Cathedral
 Dublin, St Patrick's Cathedral
 Durham Cathedral Old Choristers' Association
 Ely Society of Chorister
 Eton College Old Choristers' Association
 Gloucester Cathedral Old Choristers' Association
 Guildford Cathedral Choir Association
 Kingston upon Thames, All Saints' Choir Association
 Llandaff Cathedral Choir Association
 Lichfield Cathedral Former Choristers' Association
 Lincoln Cathedral Choir and Old Choristers' Association
 London, St Paul's Guild of Companions
 Norwich Cathedral Ex Choristers' Guild
 Oxford, Christ Church Cathedral School Old Boys
 Oxford, New College Old Choristers' Association
 Peterborough Cathedral Old Choristers' Association
 Portsmouth Cathedral Old Choristers' Association
 Rochester Cathedral Old Choristers' Association
 Salisbury Cathedral School Association
 Southwark Cathedral
 St Albans Cathedral Ex Choristers Association
 Friends of St Edmundsbury Cathedral Choirs
 Wakefield Cathedral Old Choristers' Association
 Warwick, St Mary's Guild of Ex-Choristers
 Wells Cathedral Choir Association
 Westminster Abbey Old Choristers' Association
 Westminster Cathedral Choir School Old Boys Assoc.
 Winchester Cathedral
 Winchester College Quiristers Association
 Worcester Cathedral Old Choristers' Association
 York Minster Choristers' Association

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The Federation Prayer

Almighty God, we thank you for the music we enjoyed in our lives as choristers and sang together in your house to glorify your name. Let that music always be a witness to your majesty and love, and remind us that you are always watching, and listening from your heavenly throne. May your Spirit guide us through our daily lives so that we may continue to be the instruments of your peace, and proclaim with a glad voice your honour and glory, for ever and ever. Amen.



LAST ORDERS OR NEW BEGINNINGS

THE CHAIR'S WELCOME 2025

Following the hugely successful Festival last year at Llandaff, I sat down to write the Chair's leader article for the 2024 *Once a Chorister* magazine. Never had I been more concerned for the future of the Federation than I was at that time. Heading into my final year as Chair and the final year of Alastair being Honorary Secretary, we faced the fact that we had no successors to either role and that no new recruits were stepping forward to join an ever aging Executive Committee. The repeated calls in our communications had failed to elicit a succession plan and we had no Association volunteering to host a future AGM, let alone a Festival.

The Executive met, in person, in November 2024, with the purpose of discussing one single topic - the future of the Federation. Did this mean the end of the road for an organisation that had existed for more than 100 years? This was certainly not what any of us wanted and certainly not how I had envisaged my term as Chair would end. For nearly 5 hours, on a slightly damp and grey November day, we sat in the venue in Leamington Spa where we had held our "in-person" meetings for the past 10 years.

By the time of that meeting, I had a tentative offer from Lincoln to host the 2025 AGM, but it would be a single day event, coinciding with their own annual reunion - in line with our suggested format for gatherings. By the end of the meeting we had resolved that committee members would approach their own clergy and music departments to seek permission to hold AGMs in their buildings, in the style that Lincoln was offering. Norwich, St Albans, Westminster Abbey and Rochester were the targets for 2026-29. We also resolved that the position of Chair would be held by the representative from the Association hosting the next AGM. Thus, Ayrton Westwood would be nominated as Chair at the 2025 AGM for the year to autumn 2026 when the AGM would be held in Norwich. He would be followed by Richard Lilley and Richard Watts. This plan would at least buy us time, during which we could continue to seek a more permanent solution.

We met again, over Zoom, in March, to formally accept the invitation from Lincoln to hold the 2025 AGM there in October and to go forward with the proposed plan for future years. The question of filling the Honorary Secretary role had still not been resolved and it was agreed that the incoming Chair would be responsible for sourcing/recruiting someone to fulfil that role. We were also unable to resolve how or in what way the Federation would continue to communicate with its membership or what else it might do, other than come together for the AGM.

In May, quite unexpectedly, I was approached by Samuel Barber and Oliver Hamilton-Box of the Peterborough Old Choristers' Association with a surprising and exciting offer. Samuel had been the FCOCA Representative for the Peterborough Association for some time and was succeeded by Oliver, who also served on the OaC Executive Committee for a short period. They are, respectively, the Chair and Secretary of their Association and have reinvigorated it over the past few years through the use of digital technology, whilst, at the same time, reducing running costs. This has resulted in much higher attendance at their annual gathering with a lower average age of those

attending. Their offer was to apply the same management techniques to the running of the Federation and offer themselves as Chair and Secretary, with a third member of their Peterborough team, Bradley Odep, as Treasurer. This proposal was put to the Executive and we asked them to provide a written business plan and meet with the Committee to discuss its implementation.

It is this proposal that is being put to the AGM, it being wholeheartedly endorsed and supported by the Executive Committee. It is the opinion of the Executive that this proposal is not only the best option for the future survival of the Federation but it also provides a blueprint for Associations to copy, to bring their organisations into the 21st century, and to reinvigorate them with new and younger members.

Sam, Ollie and Bradley's passion for what they do is palpable. Their principal objective is to do all they can to ensure the future of the Federation, for it to be the primary organisation that represents former choristers and that it continues to celebrate the importance of choral music in Christian worship, as it has strived to do since its formation. They have demonstrated their ability to deliver real results through the use of digital technology and have solved many of the issues faced by voluntary organisations, such as GDPR and Safeguarding.

I wish the Peterborough team every success in the future and implore that you, the Federation membership, approve the proposal and do all you can to support them in their quest to make Once a Chorister the national voice of all former choristers.

This being my last Chair's Report, I must thank, with my whole heart, those that have served the Executive Committee over the past 5, somewhat testing, years and have supported me over that time. I also thank them for their enduring friendship, which will always be with me. It has been a huge honour to be Chair of this organisation and, during my time as a member of the Executive Committee, come to know so many wonderful people who have served their places of worship as choristers and enjoyed sharing their experiences at our gatherings. I will continue to serve and support the Federation in any way that I can and look forward to seeing you at many more annual gatherings.

Once a Chorister, Always a Chorister.

Nick Hodges

Chair, Once a Chorister

FROM THE SECRETARY

After a fantastic festival in Llandaff last year, this year the committee met in person on 20th March and via Zoom on 25th June. We met again on 2nd September to discuss the proposal from Samuel, Oliver and Bradley to reinvigorate OaC / The Federation.

I do not intend to repeat the same information as in our Chair's report, other to pass on my thanks for Nick's guidance and friendship over the past 10+ years, as we alternated in the roles of Secretary, Vice-Chair and Chair.

I have very much enjoyed my time serving you as a committee member for over 15 years, but all good things come to an end, As my hair turns grey and my memory starts to fail me I decided it was time to hand over to someone else, and I am so pleased that there are other former choristers who want to keep OaC going. I shall continue to serve OaC where I can, but in the background. Thank you to you all.

Alastair Pollard

Honorary Secretary



2025 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING LINCOLN CATHEDRAL

Fellowship of Lincoln Cathedral Old Choristers Annual Commemoration

Act of Remembrance and Evensong

&

Annual General Meeting of the
Federation of Cathedral Old Choristers' Associations

Sunday 5th October 2025

- 10.30 am **Sung Eucharist**
- 12.00 pm Meet to purchase own lunches at the Cathedral Café.
FCOCA Members visiting Lincoln for the AGM to join FLCOC members for lunch.
- 1.45 pm: FCOCA AGM in The Dunlop Butler Meeting Room
 Or
 Guided Tour of Cathedral Exhibition Gallery, the Discovery Centre and Angel Choir.
 Curator and Guide: Fern Dawson
- 2.45 pm Rehearsal for Evensong in St Hughs Choir
 Attended by Old Choristers
- 3.30 pm: Act of Remembrance, Works Chapel.
 Attended by Lincoln Old Choristers
- 3.45pm: **Choral Evensong**
 Byrd; Responses (formerly *Organist and Master of the Choristers*, Lincoln)
 Psalm 142
 Dyson in D
 Wood; O Thou, the central orb (words by H.R.Bramley, former Precentor of Lincoln)

 Aric Prentice *Director of Music and Master of the Choristers*
 Jeffrey Makinson *Assistant Director and Organist*

 Followed by Drinks Reception hosted by The Very Revd Dr Simon Jones, *Dean of Lincoln*



*The West End of Lincoln Cathedral.
Photograph: Alastair Pollard*

A REVIEW OF THE 2025 AGM

This year's AGM took place at Lincoln Cathedral, during Old Chorister Association reunion. Alastair Pollard (Durham) offers a personal view of the event for those unable to attend.

At one stage, we were worried that there wouldn't be a former chorister gathering in 2025 as we were struggling to find a willing host. Fortunately, the Fellowship of Lincoln Cathedral Old Choristers answered our plea and invited us to hold our AGM on the same day as their Annual Commemoration Act of Remembrance and Evensong. The Once a Chorister (OaC) committee had already decided that we would try to hold at least one event each year, and if a full 3-day festival was not possible then maybe the AGM could take place as part of one of our member association's gatherings. Subsequently, we have had similar offers for the next few years at cathedrals around the country.

As many attendees were likely to stay in Lincoln on the Saturday night, the Lincoln Old Choristers booked dinner for us in the upstairs room of a local Italian Restaurant. Gino's Ristorante Pizzeria Italiano was a super location (a stone's throw from the Cathedral and several hotels) and the food was of the highest standard – I can thoroughly recommend the Pollo Alla Crema). It was great to catch up with existing friends and make new friends. Whilst some stayed out late, my wife and I diligently followed the SatNav to find our hotel and parking in the city centre.

After a hearty breakfast we decided to leave the car in the car park as many roads in the city were closed on Sunday morning for the Lincoln half marathon - very poor planning on the part of the local council to arrange their marathon on the same day as the OaC gathering! So my wife and I set off on the mountain-climb up the hill to Lincoln Cathedral. Fortunately, the distance walked, and the time taken, were rather less than I had anticipated so we arrived in plenty of time to hear the cathedral girls choir rehearsing for the Eucharist. The choir was on good form: their psalm chanting is first class and I particularly enjoyed the Palestrina Missa Brevis. The service sheet includes the melody of the congregation components, some on a five-line staff and some on a four-line staff like plainsong. At least most former choristers would be able to interpret both musical notations. The choir sang Psalm 150 as they left St. Hugh's Choir (Sometimes called a Chancel or Quire).

After a rushed cup of coffee we retired to the Cathedral Café for lunch, although many of us were not that hungry having had a hearty breakfast at our respective hotels. We didn't have a

lot of spare time as we had 2 service, a choir rehearsal, an Act of Remembrance, an AGM, and Deanery reception all to pack into 6 hours.

The OaC AGM was held in the Dunlop Butler Meeting room. Over 20 former choristers (including our first lady delegates) sat down to complete the formal parts of our AGM. We only had a limited time before many former choristers were called to choir rehearsal. The main topic of conversation was a proposal by some former choristers at Peterborough association to re-invigorate The Federation, and recruit (particularly younger) former choristers through the use of social media, electronic communication and online financial services. The motion was carried, and we welcomed younger former choristers into the Chair, Secretary and Treasurer positions on the OaC Committee. The outgoing members of the committee (Nick Hodges, Alastair Pollard, Michael Lake and Richard Watts) were all elected as Vice-Presidents so shall remain with the committee to enable a smooth handover with continuity.

Just before Evensong, we were invited to the Works Chapel in the Cathedral for the Old Choristers' Act of Remembrance. A simple ceremony to remember those choristers who gave their lives in war. The ceremony ended



The Chorister Memorial located in the Works Chapel of Lincoln Cathedral. Photograph: Alastair Pollard

with all singing, to the hymn tune Dundee:

*One family, we dwell with him,
one Church, above, beneath;
though now divided by the stream,
the narrow stream of death.*

At Evensong, we had the Cathedral Boys choir, this time joined by 27 former choristers, both ladies and gentlemen, from Lincoln and other associations in The Federation. They were invited to sing almost all the music, all well-known pieces to most former choristers:- Preces and Responses by Byrd, Dyson in D Mag & Nunc, and Charles Wood's magnificent Anthem "O though the central orb. Once again the psalm chanting was first class.

After a quick photograph, we retired to the deanery for a glass of wine, thanks, and goodbyes, before the long drive home. A very successful gathering, and thanks must go to The Dean and his Team and John & Lawrence from the

Fellowship of Lincoln Cathedral OCs. Here's to the next OaC gathering in Norwich.



A newspaper cutting pinned up on a noticeboard in Lincoln Cathedral caught my eye. As a former chorister at Durham Cathedral in the 1970s I couldn't just let this go! The author states "The inside of Durham matches the beauty of the outside: the gigantic nave, rib-vaulted ceilings, the scale of Norman ambition." Both cathedrals were started at a similar time (the late 9th century), but whereas Durham has retained most of its original Norman structure, Lincoln has been rebuilt over the years in Gothic style. Taste and preference is very much a personal opinion, but I think Durham Cathedral is better!

Alastair Pollard

Durham Cathedral OC 1970 – 1974

FUTURE EVENTS

2026	Norwich Cathedral	27th September
2027	St Albans	
2028	Westminster Abbey	
2029	Rochester	TBC
2030	Eton College	

We are always looking for Member Associations to host a Festival. If your Association is interested, please contact the Federation's Honorary Secretary.



A VIEW FROM LINCOLN

John Parry, representing the Fellowship of Lincoln Cathedral Old Choristers, shares his perspective on the recent reunion and AGM

Following OaC 2024 AGM at Llandaff it was acknowledged that the enthusiasm for hosting future week end long Festivals was waning. However, in order, to give time to consider other arrangements the Lincoln FCOCA representatives gained approval by their Dean and Chapter to host the FCOCA OaC 2025 AGM. Other Associations also to be invited to participate in Lincoln's FLCOC 's one day Annual Commemoration and Reunion arranged for Saturday 5th October 2025. Although the format to hold the FCOCA AGM was different to previous Federation events, post the Dean's Drinks' Reception it was considered the Lincoln experience had turned out to be a most enjoyable and successful weekend. The outcome resulting as a possible Template for future FCOCA AGMs.

The day began with FCOCA Members visiting Lincoln for the AGM to join FLCOC members for lunch in the Cathedral Café. The FCOCA OaC 2025 AGM followed with Members welcomed by the Chairman who led the Federation prayer. The Secretary followed with announcing the names of twenty-two former choristers who passed away since AGM 2024. Prior to the election of Officer's and Reports the discussion focussed on a proposal by the Peterborough Association with a vision to "Revitalise and Unite Our Organisation for the 21st Century and Beyond".

Like many other former choristers (including OaC executive committee members) they were concerned about the future of FCOCA/OaC. However, based upon successful efforts and outcomes by the Peterborough Association they felt that they could bring new ideas and energy to build on what the FCOCA already have. Following further discussion and advocacy as indicated in the AGM detailed minutes, members approved the tabled proposal for "The Modernisation and Strategic Growth of the Federation of Cathedral Old Choristers Association (FCOCA)." Proposed by Samuel Barber and seconded by Nick Hodges. This would include a vision for FCOCA to be the leading national hub for former choristers, fostering lifelong connections, musical

excellence, and ongoing engagement with cathedral and church music.

For visitors not attending the AGM a tour had been arranged and guided by the Curator Fern Dawson. The Lincoln Cathedral Exhibition Gallery and Discovery Centre is home to a selection of fascinating artefacts - many of which have never been on display before. Each different object reveals a unique insight into the cathedral, and the people associated with it. Fern then extended the tour to include the Cathedral Nave, St Hughes Choir, and the Angel Choir where the famous Lincoln Imp can be seen.

After the AGM and the Cathedral Tour, members joined the choir for evensong rehearsal in St Hughs Choir. Following tradition during its' Annual Commemoration of Old Choristers Act of Remembrance was held in the Works Chapel, an Old Chorister and Chorister laid a wreath on the Old Choristers War Memorial. The Succentor, Canon Darren McFarland also led prayers to the memory of Roy Hutchinson who died on 7th March, 2025. He sang in Lincoln Cathedral Choir from 1944 to 1951.

For evensong participating old choristers including FCOCA visitors much appreciated singing with the cathedral choir for Byrd Responses, Ps 142, Dyson in D and Wood, O thou, the central orb (words by H.R. Bramley, former Precentor of Lincoln). Under the direction of Aric Prentice Director of Music and Master of the Choristers with Jeffrey Makinson Assistant Director and Organist. The Organ Voluntary was Grand Choeur Diallogue Eugene Gigout

After Evensong a drinks reception was hosted by the Dean Very Rev. Dr Simon Jones. It was held in the Deanery, for some forty old Chorister attendees with guests.

H. John Parry
FLCOC Representative

TREASURER'S REPORT

Again this year not a great deal to say about the accounts covering the year ended December 31, 2024, as our entries continue to be limited! The figure for subscriptions is lower than in the previous year, although there have been some associations who have “caught up” with their payments this year, so aside a couple of mothballed associations the total subs is not dissimilar from previously.

Since the transfer of some of our funds to a savings account we are starting to receive bank interest. Still a surplus to carry forward to 2025, remembering in 2023 we benefited from the repayment of part of our insurance premiums. Looking over to the balance sheet you will note that our bank balances continue to rise gradually.

Michael Lake

Treasurer

THE FEDERATION OF CATHEDRAL OLD CHORISTERS' ASSOCIATIONS

Statement of Income and Expenditure for the year ended 31 December 2024

INCOME	2024	2023
Subscriptions	£ 660.00	£ 760.00
Donations	-	£ 250.00
Interest	£ 27.00	-
Total	£ 687.00	£ 1,010.00
EXPENDITURE		
Insurance	£ 760.00	£ (245.00)
(Association Contributions)	£ (30.00)	-
Printing	£ 189.00	-
Subscriptions	£ 20.00	£ 34.00
Total	£ 179.00	£ (211.00)
Surplus (Deficit)	£ 508.00	£ 1,221



THE FEDERATION OF CATHEDRAL OLD CHORISTERS' ASSOCIATIONS
Balance Sheet as of 31 December 2024

FIXED ASSETS	2024	2023
Chairman's Chain of Office and Secretary's Pendant ²	£33,200.00	£ 33,200.00
CURRENT ASSETS		
Stock ³	-	-
Debtors ⁴	-	-
Bank ⁵		
Current Account	£ 906.00	£ 9,435.00
Deposit Account	£ 9,133.00	£ 106.00
Total	£ 10,039.00	£ 9,530.00
CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Creditors	-	-
NET ASSETS	£ 43,239.00	£ 42,730.00
REPRESENTED BY		
Revaluation Reserve	£ 33,200.00	£ 33,200.00
Surplus brought forward	£ 9,531.00	£ 8,309.00
Surplus for the year	£ 508.00	£ 1,221.00
Surplus carried forward at 31 December 2024	£ 43,239.00	£ 42,730.00

ACCOUNTANT'S REPORT

In accordance with Section 4.8 of the Constitution, I have reviewed, without carrying out an audit, the attached annual report and financial statements of the Federation for the year ended 31 December 2024, and would certify that they are in agreement with the accounting records provided and explanations given to me.

Matthew Guest ACMA

August 31, 2025

THE FEDERATION OF CATHEDRAL OLD CHORISTERS' ASSOCIATIONS

Notes to the Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2024

1. ACCOUNTING POLICIES

- a) The Chains and Pendants are capitalised on a replacement value basis
- b) Equipment is fully depreciated in the year of acquisition

2. TANGIBLE ASSETS

Chains of Office

COST

As at 31 December 2024 £ 33,200

Additions £ -

NET BOOK VALUE

As at 31 December 2024 £ 33,200

Note: The Chains of Office and Pendants were revalued for the 2020 accounts

3. **STOCK** as at 31 December 2024 **Value**
NIL

4. **DEBTORS**

NIL

5. BANK ACCOUNTS

In general monies are held in a Current Account with Lloyds Bank Plc

6. TOURS ACCOUNT

The balance as at 31 December 2024 was NIL



AROUND THE CLOISTERS

REPORTS FROM MEMBERS

Blackburn Cathedral

Sadly, due to a progressive drop in participation numbers, this will be our final reunion in its current formal structure. Over the coming months, BCCA will gradually wind down its operation; and funds, in its accounts, will transfer to the Lantern Trust. This Trust has been set up to support the music department at Blackburn Cathedral.

Chelmsford Cathedral

In September 2024 Emma Gibbins was appointed Director of Music at Chelmsford Cathedral, and has had a busy first year ensuring that the choral tradition in the cathedral has been kept, with much work to build up the young chorister choirs, both boys and girls, as she successfully did when at Newport Cathedral previously. Many visits to schools and getting commitment from parents!

Following a series of taster sessions for potential new choristers and auditions, the new girl and boy chorister groups were formed and met to rehearse for the first time in early December. They have been singing with increasing regularity over the year to date. They are making excellent progress and are now making more regular appearances at Sunday and weekday services.

The Cathedral Choir has had many busy months and has sung at Christmas Services, the Installation of the new Dean, plus Holy Week and Easter services. On Ascension day, 15 intrepid choir members with a good head for heights ascended the Cathedral tower for a special Ascension day act of worship at 8am. People gathered in the Cathedral grounds below to hear the sound of singing floating down to the ground from the top of the tower. They were rewarded for making it up to the top... and down again with a delicious and well deserved breakfast! Over 120 people were welcomed to the revitalised Diocesan Choral Festival in June, with singers from all over the Diocese, representing an amazing 22 different churches. They gathered to rehearse together and prepare for a special combined choirs Festival Evensong, with music by Tallis, Ayleward, Brewer and Balfour Gardiner.

2025 marks 30 years since the Chancel Organ was installed, thus completing the long-term project for the two Mander organs everyone has been blessed to have in the cathedral. Such a milestone felt an opportune moment to do something special, and so it was decided to create a commercial recording, to be bought and streamed both nationally and beyond, celebrating these instruments. Everyone was delighted that Sam Bristow, Assistant Director of Music, played music by Mendelssohn on both organs for this special occasion. It was particularly great that we welcomed many former choristers to Chelmsford on this occasion, so that afterwards there was a chance to get

together and reminisce, especially as one of the main instigators for the new organs, Director of Music at the time, Dr Graham Elliott, came over from the States to be with us all to celebrate and talked to us about those days 30 years ago

Chichester Cathedral

Like many others, the Association is also struggling to maintain the interest of the younger generations, with reunions amounting to the attendance by half a dozen or so former choristers, mostly from the 1950s and 60s, at a suitable cathedral service followed by a casual drink or two in a pub afterwards. Nothing like the reunions that we used to have with a more formal lunch or supper and a few speeches.

On the bright side however, our Chorister Scholarship Trust is flourishing and supporting the choir with four bursaries paying up to 25% of a chorister's choir school fees.

Durham Cathedral

Unfortunately we have not had any DCOCA events this year, but there was a good turnout at the funeral of Alan Oyston at the Cathedral followed by a gathering at Durham School. Alan was a chorister at Durham Cathedral and went on to be President of The Federation. He will be sorely missed.

Llandaff Cathedral

In September 2024, we were delighted to host the OaC Festival. It was attended not only by representatives from across the country, but happily by several of our own former choristers, many of whom had not set foot in the cathedral since the end of their choristerships many moons ago. The Llandaff society sadly folded earlier this century, but it has long been our ambition to restart it, and the festival not only gave us the foundations upon which to begin this network, but showed us that there was an appetite for us to do so.

It may surprise you that most of our records regarding former choristers here in Llandaff have been lost, leaving us with only the most recent leavers, combined with the list of Dean's and Canon's Scholars (located on the wall of the Cathedral School's Chapel). As a result, our efforts with a new society were initially slow. However, the several Llandaff choristers who attended OaC last year have proven themselves as willing and able, and have been instrumental in working with the Cathedral and Cathedral school to reforge links with their chorister contemporaries.



The Advent Procession at Llandaff Cathedral

The result of their combined efforts bore fruit with the first reunion evensong to be held in Llandaff in over a decade. We welcomed over 30 former choristers whose time at the cathedral span eight decades, ranging from last years departed Dean's Scholars, to our 1952 Coronation Chorister, who was sent to Westminster Abbey to sing at the Coronation of HM Queen Elizabeth II.

The network continues to expand through word of mouth and the hard work of our colleagues and choristers alike, and several likely candidates to lead a new committee are beginning to present themselves. I hope that this time next year will can report further progress for the Llandaff Society.

Beyond our efforts to reestablish former chorister links, the Cathedral Music Department had another successful year, which on top of our usual pattern of worship featured a recording of BBC Radio 4 Sunday Worship, a live broadcast of Choral Evensong on BBC Radio 3, and a recording of Christmas music with Priory Records (during which we were delighted to welcome Paul Trepte, formerly of Ely Cathedral, as Producer). The regular Carol Services and concerts, alongside performances of Benjamin Britten's Ceremony of Carols and John Rutter's Dancing Day were amongst the highlights of the Michaelmas Term, while Lent term saw a devotional performance of Bob Chilcott's setting of the St John Passion. The Summer term saw the choir performing throughout the Cathedral Festival, now in its fourth successful year.

We were delighted to count 36 Choristers amongst our front rows, and for the first time ever admitted a Girl Chorister as Dean's Scholar. Our new Youth Choir welcomes back former choristers who are still in school and gives them to opportunity to continue to sing as part of the Cathedral's worship, and maintain their relationship with us.

In this coming March, the Girl Choristers will celebrate the 30th Anniversary of their first sung service in the Cathedral.

We look forward to welcoming many former choristers back for a weekend of celebration, with a concert sung by currents choristers, and works commissioned especially for the Sunday services. We look forward to reporting on a successful reunion in due course.



The Advent Procession at Llandaff Cathedral

Norwich Cathedral

It has been an exciting time of change in the music department here at Norwich. Our wonderful colleague David Dunnett retired in the summer of 2025 having served the Cathedral since 1996, first as Organist & Master of Music then, from 2007, continuing as Organist. David's musicianship, skill and experience as a Cathedral organist was unparalleled; he had an innate feeling for how the music and liturgy should go and the Cathedral organ always sounded at its very finest in his capable hands. In September this year we have been joined by two excellent and talented new colleagues. Graham Thorpe is our new Assistant Master of Music & Sub-Organist, having been Director of Music at Bradford Cathedral. Christopher Too has come to us as Assistant Organist, having held organ scholarships at St Paul's Cathedral, Westminster Cathedral, Jesus College Cambridge and Salisbury Cathedral.

The summer of 2025 saw an exciting tour by the Cathedral Choir to Paris and Normandy, concluding with two moving performances at the new British Normandy Memorial in Ver-sur-Mer. It was a remarkable experience for us all,



Choristers of Norwich with Paddington Bear



singing in the courtyard looking out over Gold beach, where so many British servicemen lost their lives on D-Day and in the ensuing Battle of Normandy in 1944.

The Cathedral Choir's new Christmas album, 'Lord of the Dance', has just been released (on all major streaming services, with physical CDs available online and in person from Norwich Cathedral shop). This exciting recording includes many favourite carols, performed in some new arrangements for organ and brass. We were proud to collaborate with renowned ensemble Onyx Brass for this project: the sound of the choir, the brass and the newly rebuilt Cathedral organ is, I think, a special one. Do get hold of a copy – the perfect Christmas gift!

Our first cohort of girl choristers in the Cathedral Choir is now rising through the ranks, having joined us in September 2024. Our mixed top line is proving successful, musically and in all other senses, with a good level of interest in choristerships from boys and girls alike. Our Senior Girls' Choir (for secondary school aged girls) continues to thrive, with 24 members from various local schools. The new Senior Boys' Choir, founded in 2024, provides 15 teenage boys with changing voices the opportunity to rehearse together weekly under the leadership of Christopher Too, singing a monthly service of Compline in the Cathedral on a Sunday night.

Plans for the busy Advent and Christmas season include our annual performance of Messiah alongside a cast of outstanding soloists, our sell-out annual Christmas concert, as well as our Christmas Processions which are attended by large numbers of people. Looking ahead to 2026, highlights will be a performance of Bach's St John Passion as well as an organ festival in July, which will include broadcasts on BBC Radio by the Cathedral Choir and by the BBC Singers who are making a welcome return to Norwich.

We are particularly looking forward to welcoming the FCOCA to Norwich for their gathering at the end of September 2026: I do hope many of you can join us for this special weekend in our 'fine city'!

Ashley Grote

Organist & Master of Music

Salisbury Cathedral

The work of Salisbury Cathedral Choir once again was dominated by the daily round of sung services - eight per week in term time. But as well as singing on its own, it shared services with San Francisco's Grace Cathedral Choir, Portsmouth Cathedral Choir, Wimborne Minster Choir, the choir of St John's, Devizes and Salisbury Cathedral's Junior and Youth Choirs. These were all happy occasions when musicians from different backgrounds combined to produce truly excellent musical results.

The Cathedral Choir had its fair share of special services in which to shine, such as the Pet Service back in September, the moving Darkness to Light Advent Processions, Fauré's Requiem for All Souls, Bach's cantata Wachet auf and Christmas Oratorio Parts 5 and 6, the high-profile Memorial

Service for Robert Willis and an Evensong sung by the senior choristers at St Matthew's Church, Westminster.

In addition to accompanying the liturgy, Salisbury Cathedral Choir gave memorable concert performances of Bach's St John Passion and Handel's Messiah, collaborated with Jethro Tull in a Christmas concert, and further afield sang concerts in the diocese, notably Winterbourne Whitechurch, Melksham, Wimborne St Giles, Marnhull and Branksome.

In Lent 2025 the boys, girls and adults of Salisbury Cathedral Choir went on tour to the Netherlands and performed to a consistently high standard. The music sung ranged from Allegri's Miserere to Parry's magnificent anthem for double choir, Lord, let me know mine end, and the audiences and congregations were large and appreciative. The choir sang in Zutphen, Utrecht, Wijk bij Duurstede, Amsterdam and Haarlem. At the St Bavokerk in Haarlem, it was wonderful to sing Evensong accompanied by an organ that had been played by Handel and Mozart.

The Southern Cathedrals Festival, hosted this year by Salisbury, celebrated the glorious tradition of music in cathedrals and the five days of the Festival in July offered seven sung services and eight concerts. We were especially delighted that the Festival opened with a Come and Sing event directed by Sir John Rutter.

Future plans for Salisbury Cathedral Choir include Diocesan concerts in Fontmell Magna, Coombe Bissett, Bradford on Avon and Compton Abbas, the annual sell-out performance of Messiah, and a concert of Bach's Easter and Ascension Oratorios with Florilegium in May 2026.

David Halls

Director of Music

The Collegiate Church of St Mary, Warwick

Michaelmas Term unfolded with the annual Ex-Choristers' reunion followed by solemn and uplifting services for All Saints', All Souls', and Remembrance, before slipping almost immediately into the busy Christmas season. As well as our Carol Services at St Mary's and beyond, a particular highlight was welcoming BBC One television back to St Mary's for a live broadcast of Midnight Mass — a great privilege.

The new calendar year began swiftly with a deeply moving Epiphany Carol Service, followed by a joint Evensong from our Boys and Gentlemen alongside the excellent Choir of Hereford Cathedral, and a lively pizza gathering. Highlights through the first half of Term included the annual Feast of Thomas Oken and the Candlemas Carol Service, marking the end of the Christmas season.

After a brief pause, we moved into the Ash Wednesday Eucharist, Mothering Sunday celebrations, and preparations for Holy Week and Easter. This year was what I often call the 'worst-case scenario' in terms of Easter, as it fell so late. The Choir had a week's break before Holy Week — and I'm grateful to Mark Swinton, Harry Sullivan and St Mary's Scholars for maintaining our choral worship for Palm Sunday — then returned for the unrelenting journey to Easter. As in previous years, the Choir excelled themselves at each step towards and through the cross, and the term reached its glorious conclusion with what are known in the



St Mary's, Warwick girls and Gentlemen at Wells Cathedral

trade as 'stonking' services on Easter Sunday.

The Choir has delivered a series of outstanding concerts, including the Girl Choristers' annual performance of Britten's A Ceremony of Carols with harpist Cecily Beer; three sold-out performances of The Snowman; a special collaboration between the Boy and Girl Choristers and Armonico Consort as part of their Supersize Polyphony II concert, and the now-traditional performance of Pergolesi's Stabat mater.

We were absolutely thrilled that one of our girl choristers, Anna Chester, became BBC Songs of Praise Junior Young Chorister of the Year. She's been kept very busy with



St Mary's, Warwick boys and Gentlemen at St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle

performances and recordings

We were very pleased to welcome our counterparts at St Mary Magdalene, Newark, for a joint Evensong at the beginning of June. Now their building restoration and renovation is complete, we look forward to a return visit in the future!

Much of the focus in the early part of the summer term was on Pentecost and the Summer Concert, with two ambitious and long-anticipated returns to the repertoire: Walton The Twelve and Bach's Magnificat in D. This year's concert was a feast of Baroque music, featuring Handel's Zadok the Priest, Vivaldi's Gloria and the Bach. The Choir was joined by the most excellent Baroque orchestra, Ensemble Sanctae Mariae. All solos were taken by members of the Choir, and it was a particular joy to see and hear so many of our choristers making easy work of some very demanding music to a full house.

During the summer break this year, the boy choristers and Gentlemen returned to Windsor Castle and the Chapel of St George to sing Choral Evensong and the girls and Gentlemen spent a very satisfying week in Wells, singing Monday-Thursday in the Cathedral and weekend services at Bath Abbey.

The Robed Choirs continue to benefit enormously from the support of the Friends of the Choir and I am pleased that the Guild of Ex-Choristers and the Friends of the Choir will be joining forces, combining their activities and enterprise in support of the Choir and our musical ministry at St Mary's.

Oliver Hancock
Director of Music

Winchester Cathedral

The Winchester Cathedral Old Choristers Association grows in strength, with over 50 new members joining over the past two years. More than 50 OCs and their spouses & friends attended one of the Cathedral's Carol Services prior to Christmas, and I am pleased to report that over 60 attended the 2025 annual dinner after singing Evensong with both the Boys and Girls Choirs in early July. We hope that there will be five members of the Girls Choir on our committee of 13 by the end of 2025, and that 2026 will similarly welcome to our committee new Boys Choir members from the Hill and Lumsden eras. We remain in robust financial shape, and continue to welcome the majority of the Chorister Leavers into our ranks under a membership scheme which enables them (or their parents!) to pay for their first 15 years in advance. Choristers are therefore spared the need to pay for themselves until their late 20s or early 30s.

The past twelve months have led to a partial improvement in relations with the Cathedral. We continue to make ourselves heard. Profound objections remain to the departure of Andrew Lumsden as the Director of Music in July 2024. Despite this, Andrew Lucas has been welcomed as a fine interim Director of Music. We welcomed Mr Lucas as one of our guests at our dinner in July, along with the other members of the Music Department.

Some changes amongst the Chapter led to this warming of relations. Dean Catherine Ogle announced her retirement after the start of this year, and she retired at the start of May. Precentor Trenier, on leave since June 2024, formally left the Cathedral Close in July. The Vice Dean, Dr Roland Riem, was appointed as Interim Dean upon the retirement



of Dean Ogle. He will remain in his post until a new permanent Dean is appointed in the coming months. The committee set up to recommend a new Dean has met with candidates. We welcome Andrew Micklefield (the new Canon Treasurer) and Julian Poppleton (Cathedral Chaplain) to the Chapter. A new Precentor and Vice Dean are likely to emerge after the new Dean is installed.

We are pleased that interviews for a permanent Director of Music are likely to take place in the new year, with an announcement expected next February. David Hill, Winchester's Director of Music between 1988 and 2002, heads up an External Advisory Group. We very much welcome both the formation of this group and particularly David's appointment. He will advise the Chapter over the appointment of the new Director of Music.

Those who have attended services in person in the Cathedral or online will have noticed that Winchester's front and back rows are back to full strength. Twelve Lay Clerks fill the back rows whilst up to 20 full choristers sing the treble line once again in the Boys Choir. There were an impressive forty applicants for the full time Lay Clerk vacancies.

We are delighted that the Choir has begun to record again. At the end of October the Choir were to be found recording in the Abbey Road studios. Plans are afoot for a tour of France in spring 2026.

Our association has helped in a number of ways. More than twenty Old Choristers donated to fund a full page advertisement in the 2025 Proms brochure, designed to recruit more Boy Choristers through the Pilgrims' School. March saw 77 of our number sign a letter from a total of 189 members of the Cathedral Community to the interim Dean requesting that the recommendations of the Bishop's Review be published and implemented in full and we welcome the announcement that he will implement all the Review's recommendations prior to his departure. It is a pity that these have not been made public.

The Pilgrims' School, which has educated the Boy Choristers since its foundation in 1931, merged with Winchester College. Announced in March, this took effect as of September. There are already close links with members of the College on Pilgrims' Governing body, with a plurality of boys attending Winchester College each year. As part of the March announcements, the Cathedral committed to fund the 22 Choristers of the Boys Choir (the Cathedral Friends largely fund the Girls Choir). After the uncertainties of post-COVID years, this announcement has been widely welcomed. The College knows Pilgrims' well, respects the latter's academic and musical teaching, and is in as strong a position as any school in the land to enable both schools to benefit from this merger.

The Association has concerns regarding the decision by the Chapter to allow the day boarding by the probationers in year 4. Nevertheless, the current top line of both the choirs is producing a rich, melodious sound and will provide an excellent example for future years.

We have also helped the Choir's fund raising for their tour of France next year. Both the Association as a whole and individual choristers are donating a total of several thousand pounds towards this tour. The Association has also committed the same amount of our funds to an upcoming tour by the Girls Choir.

Edward Bagnall

Chair, Winchester Cathedral Old Choristers Association



FEATURES

ONCE A CHORISTER FOR THE 21ST CENTURY AND BEYOND

Samuel Barber, Oliver Hamilton-Box and Bradley Odep approached The Federation (FCOCA) / Once a Chorister (OaC) in mid-2025 with a vision to “Revitalise and Unite Our Organisation for the 21st Century and Beyond”. All three former choristers are well-known members of the Peterborough Cathedral Old Choristers’ Association and hold the Federation/OaC in high regard. Like many other former choristers (including OaC executive committee members) they were concerned about the future of FCOCA/OaC, but based upon efforts in Peterborough they felt that they could bring new ideas and energy to build on what we already have, streamline some aspects such as financial management and minimising operational costs, while maintaining robust oversight. They have professional experience in digital strategy, events, communications and organisational renewal, and have youth on their side!

They have already made significant improvements in the Peterborough Association with a complete digital revitalisation (secure online payments for subscriptions and events, digital infrastructure, user-friendly communications including Social Media), a significant increase in membership engagement (nearly doubled the attendance at their events in just one year), and all of this achieved at negligible cost. They know how to do more with less and how to bring people back in. They know what works. Now they want to help do the same for the FCOCA /OaC.

Vision: To be the leading national hub for former choristers, fostering lifelong connections, musical excellence, and ongoing engagement with cathedral and church music.

Mission: To support Former Chorister Associations through advocacy, resources, events, and a collaborative network, ensuring the enduring relevance of choral heritage in modern society.

To see a Federation that connects former choristers of all ages, raise the profile of choral music and the values being a chorister bring and make membership vibrant, inclusive and worthwhile. They will offer association membership and individual membership.

Objectives include:

- Streamline operations to enhance member engagement.
- Grow FCOCA association membership levels by 10% within five years. Grow active FCOCA individual membership levels by 50% within five years.
- Introduce new revenue streams for the FCOCA following consultation and member research.
- Enhance engagement between Former Chorister Associations and their associated cathedrals and churches. Establish FCOCA as the go-to network for former chorister connection and advancement. Elevate the Federation’s identity on Social Media and revitalize our Website to expand our visibility.
- Create toolkits for member associations and offer advisory support, respond to requests from member associations for strategies to support relevance and growth (including resource sharing and forums for exchanging successful practices) and launch a mentoring programme. Expand Federation events. Introduce secure data sharing (e.g. events, news, project updates). Collaborate with cathedral choirs to invite current and recent leavers to join us and attend Federation event.
- Build and maintain a comprehensive, GDPR-compliant database of former choristers to facilitate targeted outreach and engagement.

All of this will be developed with careful attention to privacy, consent, data protection (including GDPR), ensuring that all personal information is managed securely and in compliance with relevant regulations. In addition, implement comprehensive safeguarding policies and procedures including Mandatory safeguarding training for all committee members and event volunteers. Success will be measured against goals with annual reviews. The core technological changes that are planned will be introduced at minimum expense, and ongoing charges expected to be negligible or zero.

This merged and modernised programme represents not only a commitment to progress, but also a reaffirmation of the values and traditions that have underpinned the FCOCA for generations. With a dynamic new executive at the helm, empowered by the wisdom of the existing committee, and supported by clear strategic initiatives, we are poised to secure a thriving, inclusive, and modern Federation.



MEET THE NEW TEAM

The Chairman – Samuel Barber



It is both a great honour and a real pleasure to take up the role of Chairman of the Federation of Cathedral Old Choristers Associations. My own journey with cathedral music began as a chorister at Peterborough Cathedral from 2002 to 2007, and it has been a privilege to remain closely connected ever since through the Peterborough Old Choristers' Association, where I have served on the committee and as Treasurer for the past five years.

During my time with the Peterborough association, we have worked hard to modernise our operations and refresh our engagement with members. By embracing technology and new methods of communication, we have transformed how we connect with our community — from event promotion and online interaction to strengthening our ties with the current choir. These initiatives have helped us attract new members, increase attendance at reunions and events, and enhance our direct support for the cathedral's ongoing musical life.

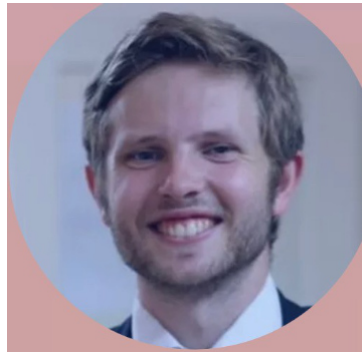
As I step into this new role, I am keen to bring together the Federation's existing members and associations under a shared vision — one that celebrates our collective history while looking confidently to the future. I hope to build stronger links across our network, ensuring that the Federation serves as a true hub for collaboration, idea-sharing, and mutual encouragement.

A particular priority for me will be to engage more recent leavers of our choirs, those who have only just stepped out of cathedral life and who may not yet have found their way into our associations. By finding new and creative ways to welcome them into

our community, we can ensure the Federation remains vibrant and relevant for generations to come.

Ultimately, I believe our strength lies in both our shared past and our shared purpose: to uphold, support, and celebrate the choral tradition that shaped us all. Through renewed energy, communication, and cooperation, I look forward to seeing the Federation continue to flourish — uniting old choristers from every corner of the country in friendship, fellowship, and a deep appreciation of the music that brought us together.

The Secretary – Ollie Hamilton-Box



It is a pleasure for me to take up the role of Secretary of the Federation of Cathedral Old Choristers Associations. My own journey in cathedral music began as a chorister at Peterborough Cathedral from 2001 to 2006 under Christopher Gower and Andrew Reid, and it has remained a defining part of my life ever since. I later sang with the Cathedral Voluntary Choir and Festival Chorus, and today my two children proudly continue that tradition as current choristers at Peterborough.

Within the Peterborough Old Choristers' Association, I have served as both Federation Representative and Hon. Secretary, and I am delighted now to serve the wider Federation in this new capacity. My aim is to bring together my experience in organisation, communication, and project delivery to strengthen the Federation's structure and ensure its continued success in the years ahead.

I would like to thank the Executive Committee for their warm welcome and tireless commitment to our shared work. Together, I hope we can continue to build on the strong foundations laid by Nick and Alastair

— preserving the traditions that unite us while embracing the practical changes that will help the Federation thrive into the future.

The Treasurer – Bradley Odep



It is a great pleasure to take up the role of Treasurer of the Federation of Cathedral Old Choristers Associations. My connection with cathedral music began as a chorister at Peterborough Cathedral, where I sang alongside Samuel during our formative years in the choir. Since then, I have remained actively involved through the Peterborough Old Choristers' Association, where I currently serve as Hon. Auditor.

Professionally, I work in cybersecurity, helping organisations manage risk and safeguard their systems. I hope to bring this same precision and forward-thinking approach to my work as Treasurer — maintaining the Federation's financial stability while ensuring we are well equipped to meet the opportunities and challenges of the years ahead.

For me, one of the Federation's greatest strengths lies in its people: the network of former choristers whose shared experiences continue to connect and inspire us. I am particularly keen to help strengthen those connections, encouraging collaboration and engagement across all our associations.

I would like to thank the Committee for their warm welcome and support. It is an honour to serve alongside such a dedicated and talented group, and I look forward to helping the Federation continue to grow and thrive.

Become a Friend and enable tomorrow's music



We're working to grow the amount of activity we can undertake to enable the flourishing of church music. Obviously, we need more support(ers) to make this possible. We are wanting to grow the number of our Friends as one of the ways that we can achieve this.

Here at the RSCM we know the key to enabling the flourishing of Church Music lies in inspiring children and young people and giving them the opportunity to take part from an early age. Without them there is no future for church music or, indeed, for the church as a whole.

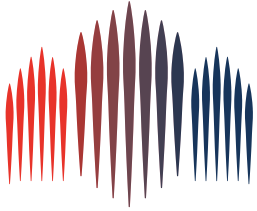
These days too few children have the opportunity to sing hymns or join choirs in churches or schools. You can help change this.

Join us as a Friend and your donation will support:

- Introducing children and young people to the joys of hymn singing through Hymnpoint!®
- Developing their musical abilities through Voice for Life® and in person training courses
- Creating a new generation of choral directors and church musicians
- Churches using music as mission to attract children and families.

Become a Friend by making a regular monthly or annual donation. Your gift will contribute directly to enabling the flourishing of church music for current and future generations. As a thank you Friends enjoy opportunities for regular updates about our work in a variety of ways.

To find out more visit our website <https://www.rscm.org.uk/support-us/friends/>



CATHEDRAL MUSIC TRUST

CEO CYCLING CHALLENGE

Jonathan Mayes is the CEO of Cathedral Music Trust.
He has asked us to highlight his current challenge;

Jonathan Mayes - JJ to his friends to differentiate himself from others including the CMT chair of trustees Jonathan Macdonald) - has chosen to take on a cycling pilgrimage, visiting 100 choirs across England and Wales in just over 50 days of cycling. Covering an epic 2,700 miles, he is raising funds for cathedral music along the way.

JJ said "I'm raising vital funds for Cathedral Music Trust, so we can continue to support cathedral musicians and choirs through our programmes – including the Cathedral Music Support Programme and Church Choir Award. In 2024, we invested £500,000 in the sector, giving grants to 28 Anglican and Roman Catholic music departments across the UK ... However this isn't just about fundraising; it is a pilgrimage. A journey to places and, critically, to have conversations with people in those places. I'm keen to use the days in the saddle to build on the communal aspect of cycling and will be inviting friends, colleagues, musicians and supporters to join me on the road."

CMT SPRING GATHERING 2025

Alastair Pollard reports on the CMT event that took place in the
North East earlier this year.

I was pleased to join members of CMT for their Spring Gathering in the North-East of England. We started at Newcastle's Anglican Cathedral (St Nicholas), to be found in the heart of the city, a short stroll from the Railway station, or a steep climb from the riverside walks. It was elevated to a cathedral relatively recently in 1882. An interesting note is that the aisles of this cathedral are wider than the nave. There is also a Roman Catholic Cathedral in Newcastle (St Mary) directly opposite the main railway station.

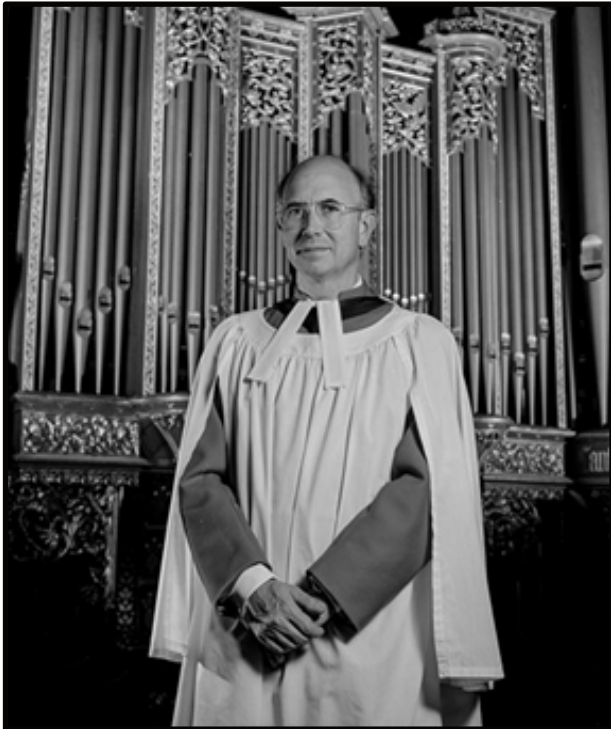
After a welcome from CMT and cathedral staff we were invited to formal tours of the building. I prefer to explore on my own so wandered around alone! The Director of Music, Ian Roberts, then talked to us about music at the cathedral, followed by a short organ recital by Kris Thomsett (Assistant DoM), and James Watson (Organ Scholar). A scrumptious Cream Tea set us up for Evensong by the Cathedral Choir.

Attendees were invited to attend a concert that evening given by The Royal Sinfonia at The Glasshouse in Gateshead (formerly The Sage), just across the river. The main piece was Ravel's Mother Goose. I was told by friends that the concert was fantastic, but as I had another engagement I will take their word for it.

Early the next day we boarded coaches for the 45 minutes journey to Hexham Abbey. Once you get out of the city traffic, it is a lovely journey along the Tyne Valley to the market Town of Hexham. It is easier to drive a car into the town centre than a large coach – road and lanes in ancient towns are not designed for large vehicles. Hexham Abbey dominates the town centre, but there is a delightful Market Square including the historic Shambles covered market. The original church was built in 674 AD, mainly using stone salvaged from various Roman ruins such as Hadrian's Wall. The interesting note about Hexham Abbey is that there is a North Aisle, but no South Aisle – it feels somewhat lopsided inside. The crypt below the nave is accessed via small steep staircase, but well worth a visit. After Coffee and cake, we were superbly entertained by a concert of sacred Music from the combined choir (ladies, gentlemen, boys and girls), most of which was unaccompanied. The choir is so much more than a typical Parish Church Choir, and could equal or exceed many Cathedral choirs.

On the third day, attendees were entertained, fed and watered at Durham Cathedral, by Daniel Cook (Director of Music at Durham Cathedral) and the Cathedral Choir. Possibly the finest Cathedral in the land.

OBITUARIES



MARTIN NEARY

1940 - 2025

Organist and Master of the Music, Winchester Cathedral

Organist and Master of the Chorister, Westminster Abbey

James Lancelot (Former Master of the Choristers and Organist at Durham Cathedral from 1985 – 2017) wrote this obituary to Martin Neary in the Church Times 1st October 2025. James was sub-organist at Winchester for 10 years under Martin, and knew Martin for 50 years.

The death of Martin Neary on 27 September brings to a close one of the most significant careers in church music of our time. As a cathedral organist for more than a quarter of a century, he maintained high standards, inspired generations of choristers, and was responsible for numerous premières and commissions, largely from Jonathan Harvey and John Tavener.

Martin Gerard James Neary was born on 28 March 1940; his father, Leonard, sang in the choir of St Michael's, Cornhill, directed at the time by Harold Darke. Initial doubts about Martin's singing ability were dispelled by the accidental discovery that he had perfect pitch, and, at the age of eight, he was admitted to the choir of the Chapel Royal. This led to an experience that was to be an inspiration to him for the rest of his life: singing at the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953. He was one of the last people to whom this occasion was a living memory.

An organ scholarship at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, followed; here, he was active in student performances, while reading at first for a degree in theology. Initial thoughts of ordination were reconsidered, however, as he began to feel, in his own words, that "music provided me a means of expression, with a power beyond that of words". As a result, the university allowed him to change to the music tripos.

Martin was appointed assistant organist of St Margaret's, Westminster, in 1963, succeeding Herbert Dawson as organist in 1965. It was at this time that he met Penny Warren, daughter of Dame Josephine Barnes and Sir Brian Warren; they were married in St Margaret's in 1967. Numerous musical engagements during this period included conductorship of Twickenham Musical Society and several recitals at the Royal Festival Hall. The Rector of St Margaret's at that time was Canon Michael Stancliffe; he was appointed Dean of Winchester in 1969, and, when the post of Organist of Winchester Cathedral fell vacant in 1972, he appointed Martin. Thus began a partnership that resulted in a period of great productivity. Martin's predecessor, the greatly loved Alwyn

Surplice, had done much to rescue the standard of the choir from the doldrums of wartime, and Martin set about continuing the process. In this he was assisted by generations of talented choristers, from whom he drew enormous respect, loyalty, and affection, and some outstanding lay clerks.

The Organist's house in the Close was a fascinating building with a Norman undercroft, and Jacobean glass in the drawing room. It was there that Martin and Penny brought up their family, at the same time making it a haven of warmth and hospitality — hospitality that I was often to enjoy during ten happy years working with Martin as the cathedral's Sub-Organist. A great sadness at this time was the diagnosis of their son Thomas as autistic; clearly musical, he nevertheless would never be a chorister — a grief that Martin and Penny bore with enormous faith and courage.

Alongside the regular services, the choir's lifeblood, there were many extra-curricular engagements, for example with Cleo Laine and John Dankworth, and the première of Andrew Lloyd Webber's Requiem in 1985, which took the choir to New York to sing alongside the choir of St Thomas's, Fifth Avenue. There were several other foreign tours, most notably to Canada and the US during the cathedral's 900th anniversary in 1979, and also to the Channel Islands, then a part of the diocese. One of the pinnacles of what was a golden age at Winchester was the première in 1981 of Jonathan Harvey's massive work *Passion and Resurrection*, the fruit of collaboration with the visionary bishop John Taylor. It is testament to Martin's priorities that, despite all these activities, evensong was never allowed to suffer; the choir maintained an enviable standard, day in, day out.

A lifelong ambition was fulfilled in 1987 when Martin was appointed Organist of Westminster Abbey, bringing him back to the place that had so inspired him 34 years earlier. Here, again, he drew the devotion of his choristers and maintained immaculate choral standards. Commissions and premières continued to flow, there were choir tours, and there was a constant round of special services, the most significant one being the funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales, in 1997, arranged at just six days' notice and involving the choristers' returning from their holidays three days beforehand. (It was after this that he was appointed LVO in the 1998 New Year Honours List.) But another service that Martin, a lifelong cricket enthusiast, will have appreciated was a celebration of the life of Brian Johnston in 1994.

His departure from the Abbey in sad circumstances in 1998 might have marked the end of a career for someone less courageous; instead, it gave him the opportunity to inspire and make music with many others both in the US and at home, where he became the first conductor of the Royal School of Church Music's Millennium Youth Choir. In his later years, he served as organist of St Michael and All Angels, Barnes, where he brought the choir to a standard at which they were able to perform Bach's St John Passion; the onset of Parkinson's disease brought about his retirement in 2022.

A demanding musician, he was none the less capable of enormous warmth and generosity. His life was inspired by his Christian faith, his love of family, and his passion for music. He leaves his wife, Penny, his companion through nearly 60 years of mutual support and happiness; his daughters, Nicola, a consultant at St George's Hospital, Tooting, and Alice, principal cellist of the BBC National Orchestra of Wales; his son, Thomas; and six grandchildren.

James Lancelot

Organist Emeritus, Durham Cathedral

Martin Neary was a truly inspiring conductor and choral teacher for his many Winchester choristers.

For this chorister--- I and 5 others began our life as Choristers just 2 years into Martin's era making and leading the music in Winchester --- Martin's leadership made a great difference. He was kind, sympathetic and observant. He made sure that one lay clerk with no head for heights was supported when singing up on the screen above the Nave Altar in Jonathan Harvey's *Passion and Resurrection*.

He instigated Winchester's touring overseas, leading the choir to Notre Dame in Paris for us to sing Allegri's *Miserere*--- the first Anglican choir to sing in that great Cathedral.

Martin was an understanding leader to choristers who had a lot on their plate. He was a cricket fan, friends with former England captain Mike Brearley, and understanding towards choristers who were athletes, though the choir came first. His three children Nicola, Alice and Tom meant the world to both Martin and Penny. I remember him playing with them on the Pilgrims' climbing frame, wearing his famous leather jacket, and thinking what a kind man he was.

Most of us had a wonderful time, some went on to become professional musicians and many of the rest adored our rather more amateur offerings in our following. We miss him very much.

Edward Bagnall

Chair, Winchester Cathedral Old Choristers Association



ALAN OYSTON

1931 - 2024

Old Chorister, Durham Cathedral

Alan was a chorister at Durham Cathedral during the second world war, Chairman and Secretary of the Durham Cathedral Old Choristers' Association for many years, and President of the Federation of Cathedral Old Choristers' Associations for 5 years. His funeral in The Cathedral on Monday 16th December 2024 was well attended by former choristers, and friends both inside and outside the cathedral family. He will be sorely missed. This is the Eulogy written and delivered at his funeral by a former chorister Simon Tasker.

How does one condense into the words of a few minutes a fitting tribute to the 93 years of so remarkable a person as Alan? I'm going to try but I will miss things out, I will omit much detail and I will probably not go anywhere near giving him the credit he deserves for very many of his multitudinous achievements. But, throughout what I am about to say, I do not for one second lose sight of the absolutely massive privilege it is to be the person delivering Alan's Eulogy.

Alan tells us in his book, *Northern Roots*, that he was born in West Stanley, County Durham in March, 1931 in a blizzard. He described his boyhood as idyllic. His Father ran a drapery business in the town which his mother took over after his Father's untimely death when Alan was just 7. With encouragement to do so from the Curate who ran the local church choir, Alan was put forward for admission to the Cathedral Choir which at the age of 11 he was granted, here joining, amongst others, George Hetherington with whom he remained a life-long friend.

Then, having become Head Chorister, in 1946 he won a Kings Scholarship to Durham School, leaving the Cathedral Choir on the first Sunday of that year. That same year he became a member of the Durham Cathedral Old Choristers' Association, the DCOCA, committee. He continued to serve on that committee in various roles for at least 50 years and in due course became Chairman of the National Federation of Old Choristers, the FCOCA, undertaking that role from 2002 until 2007. Between 1946 and 1949 the then equivalent of the CCF saw him in 'Biggles style' exploits in aeroplanes and boats and then, in 1949 he left Durham School, having gained entry to St John's College, Cambridge. First, though, he did National Service in The 1st. Battalion The Somerset Light Infantry. At St John's he read Music & History and it was there that his name started to appear on posters for concerts and recitals, directing choirs and orchestras. He spent a fourth year in Cambridge in the Department of Education before teaching practice at Leeds Grammar School. At the same time he was



in the TA, in the DLI, where in 1955 he was recommended for a Commission, becoming 2nd Lieutenant Oyston.

1955-56 was spent as a master teaching at his old school, The Chorister School, after which he went to be the music department at Chester-le-St Grammar School and very successfully established music on the curriculum as well as forming several instrumental and vocal ensembles with very willing participants and members. Whilst teaching at The Chorister School, Alan involved himself in various University musical ensembles and whilst doing so he met and fell in love with the very attractive lady leader of the University Orchestra. After a courtship which included a year when Leone was working in Bristol, on 9th August 1958 she and Alan were married and moved into their house at Nevilles Cross. Not too long afterwards they were expecting their first baby and, indeed, both David and Fiona were born at 9 Nevilles Cross Villas.

In September 1961 Alan was appointed as Lecturer in Music at Durham Tech where he set about establishing a music department, not only teaching A level students but also succeeding in having music added as part of the liberal studies curriculum for police cadets, mining apprentices, catering, secretarial and nursing students, etc. At the same time he was involved in a massive push which was happening nationally to encourage the exposure of all sectors of society to the arts. Many famous names in the arts were invited to Durham, performing at the Tech and elsewhere, and Alan was present at the creation of the Durham Arts Society which in due course morphed into the Durham Music Festival which he chaired. For a considerable number of years the Festival arranged concerts in the city by internationally renowned musicians and at the same time music at the Tech flourished.

In 1970 Alan was appointed to be Head of the Music Department at the new College of Education at Middleton St George. Subsequently, he was promoted to be College Deputy Principal and shortly after that, with the full support of the staff, he was in effect running the college. However, more education reforms dictated that the student teacher intake at Middleton-St-George should cease and the college had to close. Alan applied for and was given the post of Vice Principal of Stockton-Billingham Technical College and, shortly after that appointment, he was seconded for a time to the Education Department of Cleveland County's Further Education Service where he became heavily involved with the new YTS scheme which the government was promoting. By March, 1985 Alan had been promoted to Principal of Stockton Billingham Technical College, a post which he says gave him seven happy years. That happiness though was tinged when, sadly, in November 1987, after a prolonged illness, Leonie passed away. Then, in April, 1992, much to the great sadness of all his colleagues at the College, Alan decided to retire, his leaving party being on the same day that another former Chorister School pupil became British Prime Minister.

But Alan's life did not halt at that point. He was Director of The Durham Singers from 1984 to 2008, having taken over from his friend and colleague, the founder of the choir, Dick Addison, and proudly taking the choir from strength to strength from which many of us learnt and benefitted so much. He continued to play chamber music and to inspire, support and encourage musicians old and young. For as long as he could, he attended the Cathedral every weekend with his lifelong friend, George Hetherington. And he continued with great pride frequently to tell many of us, his friends, of David and Fiona's achievements in their chosen careers.

Throughout his life Alan encouraged, inspired and supported people from all walks of life and in all sorts of activities. He was consistently kind, generous and even tempered, rarely showing annoyance, always displaying good humour and setting a tremendous example to those around him. I have given only the barest outline of the multitude of activities and organisations to which he lent his support and in which he was involved. Some I have missed out totally. There is just too much to cover. Suffice to say that we, and countless others, have all known and benefitted immeasurably from having known, in Alan, one of the most talented and generous spirits that we could possibly ever have hoped to encounter in our lives. We owe to him, as we say farewell to his earthly incarnation, the most tremendous debt of gratitude.

Thank you, Alan.

Simon Tasker

Old Chorister, Durham Cathedral



DAVID RUFFER

1953 - 2024

*Chichester Cathedral Choristers' Association
& Scholarship Trust Chairman
(2001 – 2017)*

David Ruffer was a stalwart of the CCCA who defied health problems which challenged him from the age of 28, to live a productive life to the benefit of his family, the CCCA and many others.

Born in London of Cornish ancestry on 2nd July 1953, David grew up in Sussex, a county he came to love and call his own. An innate musician, he was appointed a chorister in the Chichester Cathedral choir in 1963 by the then organist, John Birch. A significant highlight of his time there was to sing in the UK premier of Leonard Bernstein's Chichester Psalms, commissioned for the 1965 Southern Cathedrals Festival, held in Chichester, and performed in the presence of the composer. The following year David was made Head Chorister before leaving to attend Hurspierpoint College with a music scholarship.

On leaving "Hurst", David gained his Certificate of Education at Goldsmith College and in due course a B Mus degree. His 37 year career in teaching music began at Eltham Green School, a mixed comprehensive in south east London. David was in turn to become the Head of Music at William Parker School in Hastings in 1990, and ultimately Head of Music at Bournemouth School where he stayed until his retirement.

At the age of 28, David was diagnosed with Chronic Nephritis, an incurable kidney disease. Dosed with a cocktail of medication and then thrice weekly dialysis, David struggled, but continued full time teaching, whilst awaiting a possible renal transplant. On 27th October 2000 David received the phone call to say a good match had been located, but as part of a research trial he was to receive a "non-beating" kidney from a donor who had died suddenly that morning. His would be the 72nd such transplant of which the first 39 of these had failed! David's operation took place the next morning, and thankfully, was a success giving him 24 years of a quality of life he and his family would not otherwise have had.

Throughout his career David gained both his pupils' and colleagues' admiration whilst he pursued his keenness for inclusiveness ensuring that even not so talented students could participate in and enjoy the benefits of music, a subject which he ensured took centre stage in the life of his schools. Whilst at William Parker School, David took



an interest in gamelan music, a traditional Indonesian percussive ensemble of metallophones and hand-drums. David realised this was an ideal way to enable pupils who were not so capable with usual western style musical instruments, to take part and be competent in group music making. Securing local and National Lottery funding he was able to purchase a full gamelan from Yogyakarta in Java consisting of elements based on the pentatonic scale (slendro) and others on an heptatonic scale (pelog). Thus during the following two decades, David offered literally thousands of people, of all ages, both children and some adults, the benefit of his inspirational objective of playing music together without the barrier of having to read traditional musical notation. David transferred the gamelan from Hastings to Bournemouth where he later added to the school's instrumental repertoire by acquiring an African drum collection!

David's aim for inclusivity resulted in his forming a Parents' Choir, thus extending his web into the whole community. He soon introduced not only the House Music Competition but also the House Singing Competition where large unison groups from each house presented contemporary songs, trained by the senior boys themselves under David's watchful eye. David also persuaded the staff to step out of their comfort zone and perform solos in school concerts. The respect that David was held in was reflected in the numerous condolence messages received from and the attendance at his funeral of staff and students from all his teaching posts, including one which read "you will even now always remain 'Sir' to me" from one of his first students who was only nine years his junior.

David's third child, Benjamin, had followed in his footsteps and was appointed a chorister in Chichester Cathedral. Thus David also became a chorister parent and was drawn again to the cathedral. In 1996 David joined the committee of the Chichester Cathedral Choristers' Association, being appointed its chairman in 2001, just a year after his transplant. His wife Dily adopted the role of committee secretary and their partnership became a formidable force for good within the Association. A clubbable fellow, David enhanced the social side of CCCA and as was his desire for inclusivity, chorister parents, both past and present were invited to join in the events, especially skittles matches in a pub after reunion evensongs.

Important as it was, the social side of CCCA was in David's mind secondary to its role in supporting the choristers and along with six others from the Association, he was instrumental in setting up the Scholarship Trust Fund in 2000. This charity aimed to

offer bursaries (just one to start with) to help with school fees whereby capable candidates for the choir were not excluded because of financial hurdles. As chairman of the Association, David was also chairman of the trustees and during his tenure arranged two gala concerts hosted in the Cathedral and performed by former choristers and others closely associated with choral foundation. On one occasion David brought the Bournemouth School gamelan, played by his students and at the other his school big band. The Gala Concerts' fund raising helped establish the Trust which is still active today, now offering four bursaries of up to 25% of school fees to deserving chorister families.

David was a polymath; very knowledgeable with all styles of music, of history, of castles, of cathedrals, of things Cornish, and of cricket. He was the same in his style of teaching as in his guidance of a committee meeting, and in the pub, that any conversation, no matter how it started would eventually wander through all aspects of David's interests. Following retirement, David joined various choirs, mainly to visit cathedrals when the resident choir was on holiday and to sing in his local church. Although a bass, he happily(?) sang tenor when required. He played the French horn in the Christchurch Royal British Legion Band and had been known to join a set of Morris Dancers.

David died on 13th November 2024, following some weeks in hospital as the result of numerous side effects of his life long battle nurturing his implanted kidney. His funeral was held in All Saints' Church, Southbourne. Apart from his family (Dily his wife, his three children and their families with six grandchildren), friends came from all walks of his life, both former students and teaching colleagues including the former headmaster from Hastings. The CCCA was represented by a contemporary former chorister together with two trustees of the Scholarship Fund and a former organist of the cathedral. David designed his own funeral service with hymns that a grieving congregation would be capable of singing as well as inviting close musical friends to augment the church choir and sing the Walford Davies setting for Psalm 121. To David, it would not have been a proper musical event without the inclusion of everyone singing "Sussex by the Sea", the anthem of his native county.

We bid farewell to a dear friend. Requiesce in pace, et resurgat in Gloria!

Andrew Porter

CCCA Communications.

STANLEY SCOTT

1925 - 2025

Old Chorister, Ely Cathedral (1933-41)



Stanley was born in Ely, the youngest of five children. His parents, May and Etherington Scott, had a dairy smallholding in the West Fen. Stanley joined the cathedral choir, following in the steps of his three brothers, and later, as Head Chorister, studied the organ with Marmaduke Conway. He also took on cathedral fire-watching responsibilities, which allowed him access to the upper regions of the cathedral. He loved telling the story of how he and his fellow fire-watcher shinned out to sit on the apex of the cathedral roof one moonlit night when all seemed quiet, taking their shovels with them in case they had to scoop off any incendiaries, and remarking on how they could 'see for miles!'

At the age of fifteen and a half, his voice broke and he left the choir to take up an apprenticeship in the electrical industry, working largely in the Ely area apart from two years in the Royal Navy, (the latter part of which was spent in London, helping to clear rubble and rebuild). In 1965, he was appointed Electrical Inspector at Grafham Water, later becoming Electrical Superintendent, in which role he remained until his retirement.

Stanley married Vivienne Harris in 1947. They both loved music and took part in many Ely Operatic Society productions together. They had two daughters, Vanessa and Adrienne, who, along with their mother, regularly supported their father in his organist and choirmaster duties whilst living at Wilburton. Choir numbers increased from six to over thirty, so he resurrected the Village Fete to raise funds for gowns. It was a wonderful event, with such things as a carousel, stalls, brass band and 'Win a pig' bowling, ensuring that the choir were suitably dressed very soon afterwards!

Around this time, he, and a lyricist friend, tried their hand at writing pop songs, which found them travelling to London, to promote their music. They were told it was possible they could have a hit on their hands, but it did involve parting

with a considerable sum of money. The offer was politely declined.

With the move to Grafham Water, Stanley managed to obtain a two manual pipe organ for Grafham Church – prompted by such vigorous pedalling on the harmonium in the harvest hymns, that the flowers on top came perilously close to taking a tumble! He then played regularly for services, besides rewiring the church.

Moving back to the Ely area in 1994, Stanley and Vivienne enjoyed time with their grandchildren and Vivienne's father, besides attending evensong, Federation Festivals and Old Chorister Reunions, (with a spontaneous rendition of Walmisley in D minor after one of the Federation dinners, making a particular impression). They joined the Etheldreda Guild and the Chorister Memorial flowers rota, both of which Stanley continued after Vivienne's death in 2000. Friendships made during chorister days were precious to him and lasted a lifetime, and he made a point of being at the Annual Old Chorister Evensong right to the end of his life.

A keen beekeeper, he had excellent practical skills and loved working with wood. He also loved the sea and cruising, often treating his family. At the age of 90, he became interested in model trains and built a fine town set-up, before turning to writing, learning to use a Chromebook and publishing his first light novel 'The Old Gatehouse' at the age of 94! Three books later, 'The Gatehouse Mystery' - in which he managed to include his little dog, Pip – is due for publication in November, to celebrate what would have been his 100th birthday.

Stanley's maternal grandmother had been a lady-in-waiting at Holkham Hall and later lived with the family in Ely. As a child, he often used to have afternoon tea with her and doubtless heard many a tale of 'upstairs and downstairs' which must have influenced his books and his decision to base them around a country estate in the early nineteen hundreds. In book two, the setting moves to fenland and 'Beeley' (a thinly disguised Ely), with books three and four involving Beeley choristers Anthony and Oscar. Several of the storylines are built around his own real-life happenings, though within a work of fiction. He was a fine 'storyteller' and gained enormous pleasure in tapping away at the Chromebook even as his sight began to fail. His books are available on Amazon and from Topping of Ely.

Stanley was a loving, caring, family man and a real gentleman. He possessed a remarkable zest for life, along with a fine sense of humour. Both served him well throughout his 99 years, as did his chorister training, for which he was always extremely thankful.

Vanessa Scott



JOHN MARSHALL

1946 - 2025

Chairman, Ely Cathedral Choristers' Society

John Marshall who died in June 2025 aged 79 served as Chairman of the Ely Cathedral Choristers' Society for 12 years until 2021. Although not a Cathedral Chorister himself, much as he would have liked to have been, he was a parent of an Ely Cathedral Chorister and established a strong commitment and connection to the Cathedral from that time on. In the mid 1980s he served as treasurer for the Cathedral Appeal, which was essential for securing the future of the building, such was the critical need for repair at that time. For a number of years latterly John served the Cathedral as a Liscenced Lay Minister. John had been a member of the teaching staff and Director of Studies at King's Ely and took a great deal of interest in the choristers through this connection too. John fulfilled his role as Chairman of ECCS with great interest in its members and friends. He was the Federation delegate for the Society and oversaw the organisation and hosting of the highly successful Federation Weekend at Ely in 2022, honouring his commitment to the occasion that had been previously delayed due to Covid. The Society is indebted to John for all the time and support he gave for so many years.

Andrew Marshall



KEITH DOLBY

D. 2025

Chairman, Ely Cathedral Choristers' Society



Keith Dolby was, for many years the Chairman of the Ely Cathedral Choristers' Society, (referred to then as the Society of Ely Choristers). He had been a chorister himself in the 1940s and was an instrumental driving force for the Society, firmly establishing it as a vibrant part of the Cathedral Community. Even when on holiday, his eye would be drawn to items he could bring back to sell at a stall to raise money for the Society! His day job as a journalist for the local press, furnished him with the skills and mindset to keep thorough records and minutes of the Society's activities and the annual yearbook. His wife, Glenys, also so central to the life of the Society, recalls their home becoming a pressroom, with pages methodically placed on any surface in preparation for the yearbook's publication. Keith's engagement and commitment to the Cathedral continued throughout his life as a volunteer. For someone who had given so much to the Cathedral for so long, he still sought pleasure in cleaning the cathedral, as if it was a hobby. Much of what he did was unseen. On many occasions, Keith was the cross bearer, for processions. Those following him were, as always in the safest of hands. Each year the Cathedral hosts the hugely popular Advent Procession. This has developed from a service that Keith and other Old Choristers used to meet together for. The Society and Cathedral are indebted to Keith for his considerable impact over so many years as a chorister, and member of the Cathedral community for so many years.

IN MEMORIAM

John Adams

Alto Lay Clerk, St Albans

Simon Lindley

*Assistant Organist, St Albans
Organist and Master of the Music, Leeds Parish Church*

Brian Cox

Eton College

John Marshall

Ely

Anthony Crossland

Organist and Master of the Choristers, Wells

Martin Neary

*Master of Music, Winchester
Organist and Master of the Choristers, Westminster Abbey*

Keith Dolby

Ely

Alan Oyston

Durham

Philip Eldridge

Christ Church, Oxford

David Ruffer

Chichester

Chris Gerrard

Norwich

Alistair Sampson

Organist, Eton College

Elizabeth Holroyde

St Mary's, Warwick

Stanley Scott

Ely

Graham Houghton

Chelmsford

Geoffrey Smith

St Mary's, Warwick

Peter Hughes

Christ Church, Oxford

Roger Taylor

Eton College

Richard Hurtford

St Albans

Tim Thirlway

Eton College

Roy Hutchinson

Lincoln

Roddy Williams

Assistant Master, Eton College



In 2022 the Federation of Cathedral Old Chorister Associations successfully re-branded with a new 21st century image. We now prefer to refer to ourselves as “Once a Chorister”, the name given to our magazine since the 1980s. We believe that the new name better reflects our members and what we are about.

We discovered that if you say to a chorister, “Once a Chorister”, invariably you receive the response, “Always a Chorister”. Most choristers look back with fondness at their time in their choir and will tell you that it was an experience that has stayed with them all their lives. But it wasn’t through looking back that we settled on using “Once a Chorister” as a brand name; we were very firmly looking to the future.

The Federation was founded and placed very firmly in the 20th century, but the old logo was no longer appropriate. If we are to appeal to former choristers of the 21st century we have to look as though we belong. We believe that the new simpler logo is more in tune with today.

We have to recognise that not all of our affiliated members are associated with Cathedrals but they do represent those places of worship where the very highest choral standards are maintained. Probably our biggest worry was the word “Old”. None of us wish to be thought of as old. It is for individual Associations to decide if they wish to retain “Old” in their name, and many have changed their name.

“Once a Chorister” exists to bring former choristers together and enable them to stay in touch with the world of choral music. Our purpose is clear – to celebrate choristership, which we hope to be doing for very many more years to come.

The organisation will continue formally to be the Federation of Cathedral Old Choristers’ Associations but we feel “Once a Chorister” much better expresses who we are and it rolls off the tongue more easily. We will endeavour to reduce the use of the word Federation.

The Old Chorister Magazine was renamed in 1988, Once a Chorister, the branding we have been using for the Federation since 2022. In 2016, following the death of Michael Barry, who had been editor of the magazine from 2001, the decision was taken to only publish the magazine on-line as an electronic document. Alastair Pollard edited the Magazine from 2017 until 2024, combining this duty with, firstly, his Chairmanship and, latterly, Honorary Secretary roles. The magazine is currently edited by Aaron Shilson, an Organist of Llandaff Cathedral. The magazine has followed the same format since its early years with articles related to choral music and those who are involved in it, reports on meetings and Festivals and, primarily, reports from Associations and music departments on their activities over the past year.

We have now published several editions of the Once a Chorister Magazine in electronic format, and this is the latest. Individual copies can be downloaded and printed for those who prefer a physical medium. Annual reports from Associations are normally published in the Once a Chorister magazine, but occasionally they can now be found on the Federation website www.fcoca.org.uk. This not only reduces the size of the magazine significantly and so reduces printing costs, but also means that our website has more up to date material. This does rely on Associations submitting their reports and those of their organists and master of choristers to their Regional Representative or directly to secretary@fcoca.org.uk

Once a Chorister is a great vehicle for keeping people up to date with Federation events such as the Festival and AGM, and articles of interest from similar organisations or those that potentially affect choral foundations. I hope that this edition is to your liking. Please continue to submit articles for publication in the Once a Chorister magazine or to the website:

www.fcoca.org.uk

