

Music in 2012

Martin Penny

2012 was a year of achievements, progress, welcomes and sad farewells. Much positive feedback from you all is highly encouraging - thank you - please tell us where you think we can improve too!

Ben Wilson has brought us a great enthusiasm for all things Baroque, a fine sense of humour and a great rapport with the choristers. He has also helped me build deeper and wider links with Haileybury. Sam Hall has continued to put much energy and ingenuity into providing instrumental arrangements for the All the Family Service. We are very grateful for all they both do for us.

Membership

We said goodbye to the Dixon Magee family in the summer as they moved to Birmingham in support of Lorelee's scholarship to the Royal Ballet School. We were very pleased that Joby's hard work with us paid off in the form of a Music Scholarship at his new school.

In December, as part of his retirement plan, Lynford Neville successfully auditioned to join the Rochester Cathedral Voluntary Choir starting in January 2013. Happily it does leave him able to join us from time to time - as he did on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday 2013 before doing the 6:00 am service on Easter Day at Rochester!

Thomas Oates suddenly 'grew up', adding many inches to his height, and so retired as Head Chorister in June 2012. We are very appreciative of his work as a member and leader of the 'front row'. He is now providing sterling service as a Tenor. Tom was succeeded as Head Chorister by Michael Stephens-Jones.

We ran many recruiting/outreach events in 2012. Two were aimed at adults - a 'Come and Sing' Crucifixion on Palm Sunday and a further 'Come and Sing' evensong in the Autumn. These resulted in further additions to our deputy list and a couple of full-time members.

In parallel, we increased our activities in, and with, local schools - resulting in a series of workshops in three of them during the Autumn Term. These were run with the help of Claire Tomsett of Haileybury and proved popular with

the children and teachers - but did not lead to any new recruits. It did result (along with other efforts) in a record numbers of services and events in the church in December 2012.

We are rethinking the details of our workshop approach to include parents in the process since the failure to get their 'buy-in' to transporting children on Sunday appears to be a major stumbling block.

Overall we recruited four new choristers, (Lottie Meggison, Romarlla Blanche-Drammeh, Andrew Fletcher and Bob Toll), Ann Stephens-Jones became 'full time' and we added Zoe Ford to our stable of 'regular' extras.

The instrumental group that plays at the Family Service also saw some growth with the addition of Ann S-J (Flute), Graham S-J (Horn) and Isabel Hurley (Violin). This has allowed a welcome increase in variety and the possibility of accompanying some hymns in 2013.

Team Work

We hosted choirs from across the team at the Team Eucharist for Pentecost. Although it took much juggling to fit everyone in, and a surprising number of trips round the lanes of Hertfordshire delivering copies, everyone was able to play a full part and clearly wished to do it again.

Things to celebrate

The following have been promoted in the last year:

Head Chorister: Michael Stephens-Jones

Full Chorister (Red): Eleanor Mackay

Junior Singing Girl (Light Blue): Trixie Wraith

Member (White): Lottie Meggison, Romarlla Blanche-Drammeh

We continue to support all our young singers through the MDF. Scholarships have covered music lessons (theory, piano and singing), attendance at external courses and, to my great delight, the creation of a formal 'Soundbites' Organ Scholarship currently held by Michael Stephens-Jones. During the course of the year Michael has applied himself to

developing technique, repertoire and knowledge to good effect, playing pieces before and after several services and contributing to two Soundbites concerts.

Concerts

Chris Benham pulled together three great series of 'Soundbites' concerts and, aided and abetted by Ann, an equally skilled catering team. The income from this is a key part of the whole All Saints economy. Thank you to you all.

We made a significant (i.e. expensive but worthwhile) investment in food hygiene training. All who should be (and more) are now proud holders of the relevant NVQs in Food Hygiene.

We also increased the number and nature of customers who hire the building for (mostly musical) events. Although these are, inevitably, disruptive they do gain us income, great occasions, footfall, reputation and useful relationships.

Help needed

As ever, all we do could be done even better with more time and pairs of hands. The challenge is to keep within what it is realistic to expect in terms of time and money.

My effectiveness would be much improved with some logistical help – preferably from someone who is not in the choir (they are always singing when things need doing!).

Three specific examples:

1. Soon Michael will be leaving the 'front rows'. For the last four years Ann has acted as the second adult at Monday practices (since it is hardly worth her while to go home just in time to come back again!). We do need someone to do this – and it could well be a 'team' of people. If someone could take on the task of making sure that someone is there each week it would allow me to spend more time on the music not the phone!
2. There is a boy who would love to sing with us – if we could arrange his transport to/from home. This is quite a complex thing due to the Child Protection implications. If someone could take on managing this we would have an extra chorister!

3. For the last few years Mark Dean has acted as crucifer (Cross carrier). He now has a job that involves shift work on Sundays. It would be great if someone could take on carrying the cross/finding someone to do so – it is not easy for me to do so just before a service when I'm supposed to be looking after the younger members of the choir.

If you are able to help with any of these, or would like to know what else would be of use, I'd be delighted to talk to you.

Thank You's

I would like to finish with thanks; firstly to the choir for:

- Delivering week in week out – come hail, shine, snow, ice, boiler failure or whatever (no Plagues of Locusts yet!)
- The music for Holy Week/Easter 2012 and Advent/Christmas.
- Turning out in force for Remembrance Day and all the other occasional services
- Learning even more new anthems/carols from all ages and styles.
- Working together as a large family – encouraging and supporting each other
- Putting up with me!

and also to

- Ben and Sam for their skill, support and constant good humour
- Jo, Janet & Andrew for their support and encouragement of all we do
- Nicola, Julia, and all the committee for their hard work in pulling things together
- Lynford and Chris for the monthly marathon with the folders
- Archdeacon Trevor for 'being there' throughout Holy Week 2012
- all the adults, young adults and choristers who make such wonderful music and their parents who do so much fetching & carrying
- all of you for your comments and suggestions
- and, finally, to Mary who keeps me sane – and firmly grounded in reality!