

## Christopher Benham's farewell speech



Thank you all for your being here on my last Sunday as Director of Music at All Saints'.

All Saints' has played a huge part in my life for almost twenty years. I have made many friends, a few enemies and plenty of music.

Some of you will remember me in my first role here as Assistant Organist under Michael Frith. We had met at Trent Park when I was training to become a teacher. He was one of my tutors.

He had made a trip one day to Tunford School to observe me teach. I don't remember him being very interested in the lessons I had prepared that week - but when discussions moved onto choral music and organ playing he became much more animated - partly I think, because he was just about to lose his then assistant Tony Raven.

The interview was brief – "are you free on Sunday, I'll organise a key, its *Murrill* in E."

So began my long association with the church and choir. I look back on this period with great fondness and it was a kind of apprenticeship where I was able

learn new skills and build on my existing knowledge of choral and organ repertoire.

When Michael resigned his post in 1995 I didn't feel ready to 'throw my hat into the ring' but after John Winter's unexpected departure, and having run the choir for a term in partnership with Brian Bromley, I had gained the confidence to accept the position of Director of Music when Bill Kemm and the Church Wardens offered me the post a year later.

And so, as they say, 'the rest is history' and I am grateful to Dorothy Toyn for her article in this month's magazine which is a very comprehensive account of my years at All Saints.

I do not propose to repeat any of that here but only add that I have always been inspired by this grand and imposing building. I am sure those responsible for rebuilding All Saints' over a century ago aimed for the best that could be achieved with the resources they had available to them.

Like my predecessors, my aim has been to complement this splendid building with the finest music that I could achieve with the resources available. I am grateful for the opportunities this has brought and I am proud to have been part of the great tradition of choral music at All Saints. Long may it continue and I wish Martin Penny every success in the future.

There are too many people to thank and this is not the time or place. I would however like to offer my thanks to the Vicars and Churchwardens past and present who have given me their wholehearted support. Also to my partner Julie who has sacrificed a great deal in supporting me in this role.

Above all I would like to thank and pay tribute to the members of the choir and their families - past and present - whose dedication and enthusiasm has made this such a rewarding job.