

Choir Notes, April 2019

'A sudden whoosh of hot air – no more'

When I joined the PCC in 2012, I was pleased to see that 'The Bell Tower Project' for Holy Trinity was on the agenda, and was delighted to watch its progress over the next three years at close-quarters. The time, hard work, much dedication and careful guidance have led to a celebration of what became the HARP project, and on 2nd March the choir was delighted to be asked to sing after the speeches and thanks to everyone who had donated so generously. While the scale of the original project may have been reduced, it created a fundable and manageable set of works that have transformed the church. Let me give you a choir perspective on the work that has been done, after duly acknowledging former soprano Jennifer Thomas's dedication in running the fund-raising committee, and former bass Matthew Locke's architectural skills.

Rehearsals up to 2018 were often held in near-freezing conditions. Choristers' expelled air on the high notes created a cloud of steam, and the chilly conditions caused another inconvenience for those in church for over an hour - largely solved by the WC installation in 2011. And four years earlier, anyone who needed a glass of water to clear their throat could run it from the new tap, rather than rely on a bottle.

While the church is not warm on a Wednesday night, it is certainly a much better environment to rehearse in, sometimes for up to two hours. Pages are turned more quickly and effectively without gloves on, and the lack of ear-mufflers allows choristers to hear what Jeff has to say, and what Cynthia is playing. Plus, we do not need to go to The Lions afterwards to warm up. Setting up for rehearsals is easier now. Chairs can be put where we want them to suit the different parts, and the prized seats placed over the old boiler gratings, where a modicum of warm air was offered, are no longer fought over. Processing out of the bell tower used to start with a mass of bodies negotiating the step, or delays as one chorister after the other invited their processing partner to trip up first. And then the un-harmonic clanging over the boiler gratings where a sudden whoosh of air might provide a fleeting warm feeling, before a churchwarden rushed to find a control panel somewhere to "turn the boiler off" during the service. In that way, the congregation could hear what was going on, while slowly putting back on the warm clothes that they had taken off when entering a warm church.

Apart from some practical issues, the main benefit to our ears has been the acoustic. It has changed, and for the better. We first experienced it at Norbert's Installation, and more so during the services over Christmas. Since then we have almost got used to it, and we hope that the congregation can hear the improvement.

Without these changes, the choir would not have been able to experiment at the HARP celebration evening with a 'flash mob' for Schrader's setting of 'Soon and Very Soon' with its off-beat clapping and basses pretending to be the Rag 'n' Bone Man. After that rousing start we moved into the part-song by Arthur Sullivan called 'The Long Day Closes' written before his collaboration with WS Gilbert.

'Locus Iste' is a well-known piece and, very fittingly for the thanksgiving event, it was written by Bruckner in the late 19th Century for the "Dedication of a Church". The final piece was an old favourite of Jeff's from his barber shop singing days – Langree's arrangement of 'Moon River'. It was a lovely evening and a great chance to sing a modern gospel song by memory, an early part-song, an old favourite and a well-known film song that people joined it with. Thank you to Cynthia for playing an electronic keyboard with much aplomb and without dark glasses.

Afterwards it gave the choir a chance to thank Jeff and present him with a book about the choir of Kings College Cambridge, and for him to announce to parishioners that St Paul's Cathedral would be inviting the choir back for an Evensong later in the year. Back to normal in April, with a return to Salisbury Cathedral to sing Evensong on 13th April. Thank you to William Avery for taking up the baton for that service in Jeff's absence, but he will be back to rehearse, conduct and sing the tenor lead in 'The Crucifixion' on Good Friday. It will be a good test for the new acoustics with organ, solos, choir and congregation all joining in.

Thanks to Rob Hill for running "The 100 Club", and for our supporters (hopefully now nearing 100). It is still not too late to join, even if the first draw will have been held by the time that you read this.

Greg Moore (Bass)

