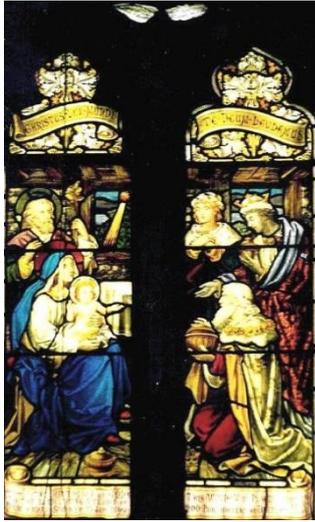


Choir Notes: January 2021



The Choir meets on 12th November to record Advent and Christmas music, unsure what will happen after lockdown ends on 3rd December. Even if we can sing more in the church, it needs recording for virtual services for those shielding at home.

We record *The Truth from Above*, a traditional carol arranged by Vaughan Williams, and *Gabriel's Message*, a Basque carol, arranged by Willcocks. The Angel Gabriel floats towards you with 'wings of drifted snow and eyes of flame'. We recorded these pieces last week, but they lacked energy, so Jeff gets out his metaphorical whip, and lashes us playfully, until we sing it better.

Then *Adam Lay Y Bounden*, by Boris Ord. Cynthia says that Mr Ord composed this the night before performance after a sociable night out. What choir would not enjoy singing it? Jeff is dissatisfied at first, and asks us to do it again in an agricultural fashion. Various members look puzzled and ask how do you do that, as the only farmer present does not talk like Eddie Grundy. Does it refer to singing or actions? Jeff does not explain, but it works, as we sing it with the energy and rawness that he wants.

Then we record the Matin Responsory for Advent Sunday. I have never sung this. It is based on work by Palestrina. 'Carols for Choirs' says 'as sung at Advent Carol Services in King's College Chapel, Cambridge'. This is an amazing piece with solo opportunities for Derek as Cantor, William replying to Derek, and Cathy, Louise and Sheena taking parts for boy trebles. It is simple, yet powerful.

We meet again on 26th November, when we might in normal times rehearse like mad for the Advent Carol Service at the weekend, but in these coronavirus times we record Christmas carols, starting with *Ding! Dong!* Jeff says 'all choruses forte' (no namby-pamby variation in dynamic for a real country choir like us). Then *God Rest You Merry Gentlemen*, also in an earthy style; and *Away in a Manger*, which, as we won't have a congregation joining in, we sing to an unusual tune. Then *O Little Town of Bethlehem*, which pauses while we discuss whether to retain '...and peace to men on Earth', or replace 'men' by 'all'. Men win on a vote, and Jeff lets slip a mildly rude joke on the spur, which he won't repeat when asked by Cynthia. Then Martin How's *Come Lord Jesus*, and we go home.

On 3rd December, Jeff says that *Ding! Dong!* came out badly, and needs to be re-recorded. What went wrong? Did we go Dong! Ding! We will never know, as we just start singing. Then *Once in Royal David's City* with Melissa, Jeff's daughter, singing the first verse (lovely). Then *Twende Bethlehemu*, the Kenyan carol that we sang last year, as Red Kite Local Radio has asked us to send them something unusual for their audience. This is about the singer walking to Bethlehem - impressive from Kenya. Perhaps one of the three Kings came from Nairobi? Then *Sleep Holy Babe*, a carol by the Revd John Bacchus Dykes (1823-1876), son of shipping magnate, William Hey Dykes. Did they shout 'Hey, Bacchus, it's a boy' when he was born? This joins Sir Arthur Sullivan's *The Long Day Endeth*, which we sang a year or two ago, in our Victorian Sentimental Song Collection. I think as I sing that it is just too maudlin for Christmas, but I listen to our recording later, and find it quite cheery. Odd.

It's just so wonderful to be singing together again! And it felt particularly wonderful when Jeff and six members of the choir were able to sing at the wedding of Claire Esberger and Wolf-Rudi Feiler at Saunderton on Saturday 5th December. Fog, mist and frost had been forecast earlier in the week, but we were blessed with a bright blue sky and brilliant winter sunshine to lift everyone's spirits.

Rob Hill

The virtual services can be seen and heard via the parish website at

<http://www.bledlowparish.org.uk/Coronavirus%20online%20services.htm>, and at: www.bledlowvirtualseervices.uk