

Choir Notes – April 2021

BBC Radio 5 Live - Sunday 7th March – Now that's what I call Lockdown



On the weekend of 27th and 28th February, I heard a feature on the Radio 5 Live weekend morning programme called 'Now that's what I call Lockdown'. They played excerpts from all types of music that had been composed during lockdown, and I immediately thought of Stephen Bartlet-Jones's works for the choir which we have used in the virtual services. I contacted Stephen and Jeff Stewart to agree which piece to send to 5Live. On 3rd March, I sent an email to the BBC and was woken up at 7.30am on Sunday 7th March listening to Stephen's *Hope* recorded by the choir in lockdown and recently re-mastered. His tagline was 'As a tribute to the enormous hope that the University of Oxford has given to humanity in its vast and varied work on Covid-19, and in particular in developing a vaccine against it'. A full sixty seconds was played, which is a long time on a talk radio programme. Stephen said that they had asked his permission that it could be played for copyright reasons, and they read out part of his reply. It is still available on the BBC Sounds App and Stephen has created a YouTube on the Virtual Services web-link.

A choral director, whom Stephen met in 2018 when the choir was singing at Durham Cathedral, had given him positive feedback to his compositions, and encouraged him to take it further. As a result, Stephen applied to the University of Creative Arts to study for a BMus in Composition and despite not meeting their minimum standard, the evidence of his compositions during lockdown meant that he has been offered a place and starts later this year. Congratulations Stephen, from Greg Moore and all the choir.

Bill Bendyshe-Brown's Funeral – Friday 12th March



In the church—by Greg Moore

The choir was honoured to be asked by Bill's family to sing at his funeral. Due to the Covid restrictions, only thirty attendees were permitted to be at the service, and they were not allowed to sing the hymns chosen by Bill. With Jeff conducting (and singing alto) and Cathy and Derek Stone and myself in the stalls, we sang '*Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart*' after the opening prayer, and '*I danced in the morning when the world was begun*' before the reading and the family tributes. Cynthia accompanied us and played the organ music beautifully throughout, all captured on a live stream and now on the church website.

In the cemetery - by Jo Stewart

This very special but sad day brings us together, whilst acknowledging the necessary distancing, to answer a request that our choir should be part of the final service for one of our respected church family, now gone to be with our Lord. We gather for the first time in many months, outside the church, as the present rules decree, along the roadside. We perhaps took too much for granted our regular weekly gatherings for our choir practices which were so suddenly curtailed. We have spent so many months just hearing each other through recordings, but we are delighted that because of our leader's dedication, we are still able, and we are happy, to be here together to honour one who was appreciative and supportive of our contribution to the worship. We are immensely warmed at Bill's own request to have us sing near his graveside. Without doubt, it will be emotional and an honour in equal measure.

As the dignified family procession emerges from the church, we respectfully follow them down the lane to the cemetery where Bill will be laid to rest. Familiar to us personally as a family, a very beautiful scene overlooking the countryside opens out before us. The strength of the wind feels appropriate, though cold, as we are swept along in a silence of warm togetherness for the purpose of this beautiful and fitting farewell. Our priests' reassuring prayers drift across the cemetery despite the noise of the buffeting wind, but I have anxious thoughts - will those loved ones by Bill's graveside hear us? A momentary silence, then the entreaty that is a prayer within the chosen hymn, '*Abide with me*...', is perfectly and beautifully delivered by our choir master, then inspiring us to follow with our best. A humbling, moving, glorious and privileged moment. A sincere thank you to Bill and Eugenie for giving us the opportunity to come together to sing in worship for such a memorable farewell to this distinguished gentleman, one of our own.

Greg Moore (bass)

The virtual services can be seen and heard via the parish website at <http://www.bledtonparish.org.uk/Coronavirus%20online%20services.htm> and at www.bledtonvirtuallservices.uk