

Saturday, 26 November to Peterborough. I travel by train. The country is flat for many miles approaching the city. The fields are covered by mist, but as the train arrives, the mist evaporates, and the day turns bright and sunny. The train skirts the Fens, and the track runs beside ploughed fields of rich black soil.

I have been to Peterborough only once previously, long ago, and find I have forgotten it. The way from the station to the city centre skirts the new Queens Shopping Centre, but past that, you might have stepped back in time, were it not for all the chain shops, including the Patisserie Valerie, where I and several others have lunch.

Then to the music School in the Cathedral Close for a rehearsal at 2p.m. We know the music well, having sung the anthem “Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence” in Paris, and the Walmisley Canticles at Coventry. The 17<sup>th</sup> Century Reading Preces and Responses are new to us, but we have practiced them, and the Tallis “O Nata Lux” thoroughly at Bledlow.

It is therefore largely a question of finishing touches. Jeff has been driving the men to sing the Magnificat in a butch and manly fashion, and now he asks the ladies to sing in an even butcher and more manly style, and urges the Choir to lose all restraint.

After rehearsal in the Beckett rooms, we calm down and re-impose restraint during our break, with time to wander about the City Centre, and then we cross to the cathedral to lose restraint again. We have a good number of men in the choir for this service: I hope the volume is stupendous, but it is hard when singing to tell how it sounds to the congregation: the cathedral is such a large and completely open space, with no choir screen, and the sound has to travel so far, that it is difficult from one side of the choir to hear the other side singing at all. Early in our practice, Jeff gets the choir to stop looking at him conducting (strange, when he perpetually chides our failure to look at him enough), and stare at the choristers opposite. This helps, at for the first time I can see that the choristers on the other side are really singing: we need to listen to them and cooperate with them too.

The service runs like clockwork. Several members of the Bledlow congregation are here, and the cathedral invites our lovely vicar Jennifer to read the Old Testament lesson, so it is like a full away team visit with much to remind us of our home a 100 miles away.

And then the next day we have the Advent Carol Service at Saunderton. We sing “Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence” as one anthem and “Remember O Thou Man” as the other. We also sing the Magnificat from the Service in G by Herbert Sumsion, which we learned for Peterborough, who then asked us to change (see last Month’s News). This is lovely, and does not require butch singing like the Walmisley the day before. “Manly” comes naturally to us, but constant hyper-manly might cause injury.