

We sing carols at Princes Risborough Railway Station for the Rennie Hospice Trust. Last year the trains were so loud as to drown out our singing. There seem fewer trains stopping this year, but longer, and quieter. One large one an hour is now headed to Oxford. People are very generous as they rush past, desperate to get home out of the cold. We raise over £250, up on last year (£232). It is a cold evening, and the trains are 20 minutes apart, with few people to whom to sing meanwhile, so we can nip into the waiting room to warm up. We could be a choir of robins clinging to twigs in a hedge with feathers ruffled to insulate from the cold, singing “cheep cheep”.

We sing at the Service of Nine Lessons and Carols at Saunderton Church. Jennifer has requested “O Magnum Mysterium” by Morten Lauridsen for her last Christmas celebration as Vicar of Bledlow-cum-Saunderton. We have sung this often before, but it stumbles in rehearsal until we remember it. It is slow, and drifts a bit until Jeff coaxes us to get a grip, and we rediscover its lovely emotive harmonies and dissonances. The choir also sings the “Shepherd's Pipe Carol” by Rutter, which may sound straightforward, but was quite challenging in rehearsal, and the “Sussex Carol”, more straightforward, but joyful and as satisfying as plum pudding.

Afterwards, Debbie and David Dobson invite us to their house for a party, which gives us an opportunity to thank Jeff for the past year. Cynthia has had to head home, and is thanked separately on Christmas day.

We have had a great year of singing due to the kindness and dedication of Jeff and Cynthia, who teach us more and more new and wonderful music. We sang another version of “O Magnum Mysterium” last Christmas by the late renaissance Victoria, which typifies the vast range of music to which Jeff has introduced us. A high point for me was the Sumsion canticles (new to me): it is hard sometimes to see at first how a piece works: there can be much learning required to understand a piece's beauty, but the effort is so worthwhile. Every piece we learn enriches us and I hope brings joy to the congregation as well as to us. Anyone can sing at home in the bath (being careful not to get your big toe stuck in the tap if carried away), but frequent performance, the need to make a reasonable sound for the congregation, and the sense that it is important to do that, makes church choir singing special. Thank you very much Jeff and Cynthia for all the joy you have given us.

On Christmas day the anthem is Ding Dong, after which we can all relax and wait in excited anticipation for what the new year will bring.