

Choir News February 2016

11th February 2016: to Bledlow for choir practice. "April is the cruellest month breeding lilacs out of the dead land..." Wrong! everyone knows February is by far the cruellest month, breeding snowdrops. It is perishing in the church. Jeff has gone to Chicago, even colder, and too flat for skiing, so eccentric at this time of year, but doubtless he has reasons.

Cynthia is taking practice, bravely both playing the organ, and correcting the singers. Are organists warmer than singers, as while singers wobble their larynxes, organists twiddle both fingers and feet together, and movement creates kinetic heat? Much moaning, me with the rest, as cold creeps into your bones after 30 minutes of sitting, and we are there for two hours.

But fun: we practice for Coventry, singing hymns which few of us have sung before strange, as most times, you expect to know say 3/4. This time ignorance wins about 6:2 on average through the choir. Cynthia grapples with the cathedral's Gospel Responses and Eucharistic Acclamations. Ejaculations precede enlightenment. Then a swift run through anthems and canticles, and time to get back in your car and turn on the heater.

And so to Coventry on Saturday, 20 February, for three services.

The Cathedral has lines of 1964 huge (compared to modern) old pennies to help choirs process in straight lines, so one has to keep one's eyes glued to the floor.

The Sunday Eucharist started with a procession, the Choir singing a drone, while the priest chanted over us, in eastern orthodox style. We basses could have been barrelchested Russians in St Petersburg, singing for the Tsar of All the Russias. Jeff entertained us by conducting while walking backwards following the priest: a shame he managed to watch where he was going, as it would have been fun if the priest had gone one way, and we had gone on in a straight line. Hyssop-infused water was sprayed as a cleansing agent (sin not dirt). A priest said Basil Spence designed the cathedral (consecrated in 1964, hence the pennies) with performance in mind, so services often have theatrical elements.

At Sunday Evensong, Derek Locke, due to sing a solo in Batten's Magnificat, was sadly unwell, so Stuart King stood in at the last moment. This was a lovely piece with contrast between solo and tutti sections. My cousin was in the congregation, and said how effective that was, and how audible all words were.

The clergy were welcoming, and Cynthia evidently enjoyed the magnificent organ,

Then Eucharist on Sunday 28th February. This was so lovely, that it could bring tears to your eyes. All who wept for joy can be forgiven. We knew the pieces well, and could watch Jeff. Cathedrals are stately, but lack intimacy: Jeff is far away across a broad aisle; but here you could see every muscle move, eyebrow twitch, and nuance

indicated as clear as day in Jeff's face and hands, and the result was magical. I am rendered silent with wonder.