

## Choir News – February 2023



So, we reach the end of another year - one of our busiest - without fatigue, and with our enthusiasm intact and glowing. Christmas services are easy, as you have sung the core tunes for years. We still have to refresh memories, and bring it all up to scratch, to sound fresh, even though sung a hundred times before.

Jeff recommends a YouTube recording of Pentatonix singing *'The Carol of the Bells'* to see how it should be done. As the group's name suggests, there are five of them, so our version is different, but is recorded, and sounds good when played back. At the last rehearsal, Fiona's *'I sing of a Maiden'* doesn't quite reach performance standard, but Jeff says that we will practice it on the day, and seems relaxed, and indeed, it does work on the day, so all is well.

We gather round the piano to sing Paul Carr's arrangement of *'In The Bleak Midwinter'*. This is not, as you might think, to create a warm and gentle sound, but because we can't hear the piano in the chancel, as the chancel wall is in the way. We squash into the small space to the east of the piano, which I hope produced a lovely warm sound - hard to know when you are the ones singing.

The service on Christmas morning has great congregational singing of many favourite carols. The Choir sings *'Ding Dong Merrily on High'*, usual for us on Christmas Day, as we need something that we know well and can sing without prior practice; choir numbers tend to be lower on Christmas Day because of family commitments, so we need well known and easy music. Jeff says *fortissimo* throughout, so it's not subtle, but does the job.

Our next cathedral visit is to Southwark Cathedral (above) to sing Evensong on 14<sup>th</sup> January. We have only two rehearsals for this. We are singing *'Save Us, O Lord'* by Edward Bairstow (1874-1946); and Canticles by Christopher Knott (born 1949, and still living). We have sung these before, but a long time ago. The rehearsal on 4<sup>th</sup> January goes well. In earlier times, we might have needed at least three or four Bledlow rehearsals to get a programme of work up to standard. This shows an improvement, to be able to do it in just two!

So, to a review of the year. We sang at seventeen services in our parish churches, including two Choral Evensongs at Saunderton, which we will continue to do on the last Sunday of the month in months with five Sundays.

We sang five times away from Bledlow, at the cathedrals of St Paul's, Salisbury, Lichfield and St David's, and at the Chapel of the Old Royal Naval College at Greenwich. We practice hard for these events, and learn repertoire that we can then use at home. We have to reach cathedral standard, and we succeed, as they ask us back! Not everyone is asked back! A member of the congregation at the Royal Naval College Chapel comments on our disciplined performance! I watch cathedral choirs on YouTube. Hey, they sing all the right notes! In the right order and when the choirmaster, whom they watch like hawks, signals them to. We may never quite achieve that, but Jeff works incredibly hard to move us in the right direction, like a little tugboat bringing a supertanker into harbour, and we achieve a great deal, even if short of perfection!

Jeff continues to exhort us to watch him all the time, and for the basses to show emotion beyond our habitual dead look.



Aelred of Rievaulx (left) said of 12<sup>th</sup> century choral singing: *“Why that swelling and swooping of the voice?...Sometimes you see a man with his mouth open...now he imitates the agonies of the dying or the swooning of persons in pain...his whole body is violently agitated by histrionic gesticulations - contorted lips, rolling eyes, hunching shoulders - and drumming fingers keep time with every single note...Meanwhile ordinary folk stand there awestruck, stupefied, marveling at...the saucy gestures of the singers...jeering*

*and snickering, until you would think they had come...to a theatre.”* We still have a long way to go!

**STOP PRESS:** Jeff has taken a poll and cancelled our rehearsal on 19<sup>th</sup> January, so that the Choir can attend the Positive Life Kenya Quiz at The Lions of Bledlow that evening. Will there be a singing round as part of the quiz? We will have to wait and see, but even without, I am sure that we can field some strong teams!

*Rob Hill*