

Southern Cathedrals' Festival at Winchester: 16-20 July 2014

Blackburn Cathedral's Music & More online Supplement No. 51a

*Five marvellous days with David & Ruth
and John Bertalot at the Winchester S. C. Festival, 2014*

David and Ruth are most gracious and delightful friends who live nearish to Blackburn (David is an honorary Old Chorister of Blackburn Cathedral through his many acts of generosity to us in so many ways) ... **David drove us to Winchester** in July to enjoy the **Southern Cathedrals' Festival** (having enjoyed, together, the SCF at Chichester last year and the SCF at Salisbury the year before).

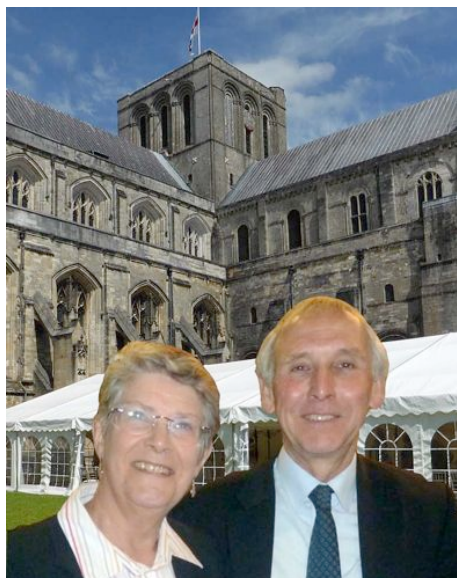
We broke our journey near Oxford for a delicious lunch at **The Trout Inn, Wolvercote**. (*Highly recommended – a 17th century pub nestling alongside the river Thames, with marvellous cuisine – but you need to book ahead! See their website.*)



On arriving at the **Mercure Wessex Hotel in Winchester** (with quiet and welcoming rooms, and splendid breakfasts) we discovered that the hotel is right next to the cathedral – an ideal place to stay!



We three treated our visit as a relaxed holiday – just going to one or two cathedral events each day.



It was a great joy, on the Thursday, to meet **Dr Alan and Tina Thurlow** after a Patrons' Reception in the vast Marquee in the Cathedral Close – Alan being Director of Music Emeritus of Chichester Cathedral. They were there just for that one day, for Alan was booked to play for a cousin's wedding the next day.

A photograph was in order – but I discovered the battery in my camera hadn't been sufficiently charged, so here are Tina and Alan, photo-shopped!



It was a particular joy during those five days to meet folk who either knew me or knew a mutual friend.

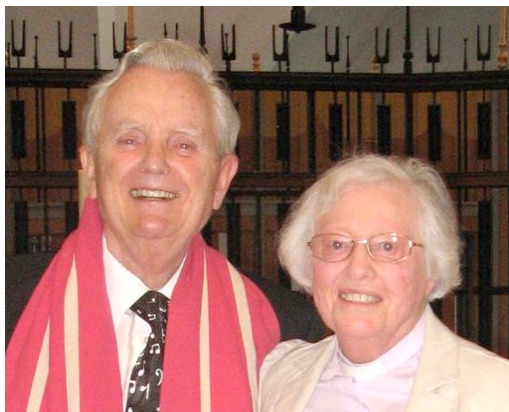
For example, I got into conversation with a couple who were staying at our hotel – he was a cousin of **Dr. Bernard Rose** (former **Informator Choristarum** of Magdalen College, Oxford, with whom I had studied many years ago). He told me that Bernard's widow is still with us, and that during WWII she 'delivered' planes from factories where they had been built, to RAF stations

from where they would become operational. I gather that a number of female pilots flew similar missions – all on their own without a crew!

As David and Ruth and I were walking past the marquee that evening, I was greeted by a lady who was sitting in the sunshine. 'You're Roy Massey!' she said. (No greater compliment could be imagined – Roy being a brilliant organist, a lifelong friend and former Director of Music of Hereford Cathedral.) When I gently corrected her, she graciously re-recognised me!

Another friend, **The Revd Ann Barber**, was at the cathedral concert that night (which was devoted to the exquisite music of Maurice Duruflé and sung, so sensitively, by the three cathedral choirs conducted, in turn, by their three directors of music). Ann and I had grown up together in Shoreham-by-Sea, Sussex. Her brother, John, was at school with me and we both sang in the local church choir. He, like his sister, is also ordained. Ann was one of the first C of E women to be priested 20 years ago!

Again, as my camera wasn't charged, you'll have to make do with a photo of Ann and me taken in Blackburn Cathedral three years earlier.



*The Duruflé concert,
sung by the men and boys' choirs of Chichester, Salisbury and Winchester,
conducted in turn by their own Directors of Music,
was blissful –
ending, of course, with his divine Requiem.*



I made sure that night that my camera's battery was well re-charged for the rest of the visit!

Friday, July 18.

Robert Quinney, newly appointed Director of Music of New College, Oxford, gave a stunning noonday recital on the cathedral's magnificent organ.

I had the pleasure of sitting in the Quire with **Sebastian Thomson**, former DoM of St. Matthew's Northampton, where I had begun my own career 56 years ago (!) and his father, **Dr. Andrew Thomson**. *Sebastian is now Head of Academic Music and Assistant DoM at Bloxham School. He had given a superb organ recital in Blackburn Cathedral a couple of months earlier. He's a musician whose career will go places. Look at his fine website: sebastianthomson.co.uk*



Sebastian Thomson at Blackburn Cathedral.



Robert Quinney's recital at Winchester Cathedral

But sitting, as we were, directly opposite the Winchester organ pipes wasn't the best place to appreciate Robert Quinney's recital, even though we could see him playing, projected onto a screen in the Chancel, because an organ the size of that at Winchester Cathedral needs the aura of a cathedral acoustic to give it 'presence'.

His programme was demanding: Reger's *Dankpsalm*, Francis Potts' *Sonata Breve*, a Bach Chorale Prelude and ending with Dupré's *Evocation*. **David and Ruth were sitting in the Nave from where the organ sounded far better.**

After the recital there was a delicious buffet luncheon in the hospitable marquee and, as the tables seated ten people, we were always sure of meeting most interesting folk – and finding, more often than not, that we had connections.

This was especially true that day for, sitting next to David & Ruth were a delightful couple, Terry & Sheila - in red - (no surname - to preserve their privacy).



Sheila proved to be a cousin of **Tim Cook**, who had been assistant Director of Music of Blackburn Cathedral some 10 years ago, and who was now the UK representative for Allen organs – which takes him all over the UK. We struck up a warm friendship with this delightful couple, both of whom were stewards of the Winchester Festival and therefore knew everybody.

As David and Ruth and I were about to enter the cathedral for that evening's concert a man stepped forward to greet me. 'I'm **Eric Fletcher** – we were at Cambridge together!' I was amazed that he had recognised me after 56 years!

He had been organ scholar of Pembroke and I at Corpus.

I remember that Eric generously proposed that I should succeed him as official accompanist of the Cambridge University Musical Society – i.e. the university's choral society; it was a privilege I enjoyed for two years, culminating in playing the organ in King's Chapel for a performance of Handel's *Israel in Egypt*, with soloists, vast chorus and orchestra. In those days 'authentic' performances had yet to become the norm, and so I threw caution to the winds in the final chorus and blasted choir and orchestra with full organ and 32ft reed!



That evening's concert in Winchester Cathedral was sung by the men from the three cathedral choirs, with the girls from Salisbury and Winchester. They were all superb!

The whole Festival was geared to the centenary of the outbreak of WWI, and one of the anthems sung that night was '*For the fallen*' by **Mark Blatchley**. I found this especially moving for I was standing next to Mark when he played the organ for his anthem in the Royal Albert Hall for the Annual Festival of Remembrance in November 1982 in the presence of the Royal Family – live on TV.

It was sung in 1982 by the boys of St. Paul's Cathedral directed by **Barry Rose**. It turned out that one of his choristers at that time was **Richard Tanner**, who later became DoM of Blackburn Cathedral!



It was my privilege to play the RAH organ for the rest of that 1982 memorable evening – a high spot being playing two verses

of the National Anthem in the presence of my Queen, which was sung lustily by the 6,000 audience, with the massed bands of the Grenadier Guards to add even more pep to full organ! A never-to-be-forgotten experience!

But three other high spots for me this 2014 July evening at Winchester were three organ solos played by **Justin Miller**, organ scholar at Winchester. (See photo below.) Justin had been organ scholar of Blackburn Cathedral five years ago, having studied previously at Princeton NJ – so we had many friends in common.

I was delighted when Justin played Bach's *Kyrie Gott* (BWV 671), for he added stops towards the end, culminating with the 32ft reed. So 'unauthentic' playing of Bach and Handel is still OK!

Of course we couldn't take photographs during concerts, but nothing was said about photos after concerts – so as David, Ruth and I were sitting almost on the front row, I caught the choristers leaving the platform when much well-deserved applause rang around that glorious cathedral.



Justin Miller



Saturday, July 19.

The 11.00 am Festival Eucharist was a most impressive occasion and sung by the Boys and Gentlemen of the three Cathedral Choirs, with Deans and Bishops as far as the eye could see.

We three, David & Ruth and JB, sat about halfway down the Nave (making a change from the near-front seats we occupied for concerts) so that we could see everything that was going on. The processional hymn was well timed – for there were a lot of people to move from the West end of the Nave to the Nave altar with choir platforms behind.

JB happened to glance behind him as the clergy were being led in by vergers from the three cathedrals, and caught the eye of **Howard Waddell**, Head Verger of Chichester Cathedral – who had been our Head Virger at Blackburn. It was a happy chance that we made that brief contact of recognition, for I had stayed with Howard when I led a workshop for the cathedral choristers during the Chichester SCF seven years before. Howard had



been my gracious and generous host.



The service was sung to Rheinberger's *Mass in E flat* (unaccompanied) and our preacher was the former Bishop of Wakefield, The Rt. Revd. Stephen Platten, who was now Rector of St. Michael's Church, Cornhill, where my RCM teacher, Dr Harold Darke, had been organist for over 50 years.

To hear the spoken word clearly in Winchester Cathedral is as difficult as it is at Blackburn, and we were in the worst place to hear the spoken parts of the service – but we caught most of the sermon – which was laced with much humour.

Again, photographs were not allowed during the service, and so I took this one immediately after the recessions, as **Justin Miller** played Jeanne Demessieux's *Te Deum* – brilliantly, of course.

Then came the Festival Luncheon in the glorious marquee – for the cathedrals' leaders and for those of us who had paid. Again, David and Ruth and I were fortunate in our companions at our table – two Americans from Alabama, Dr Jeff McLelland and his former professor, Dr. Paul Anderson. Jeff was DoM of a large Presbyterian Church Birmingham Alabama, who had, apparently, heard of me! Nice!





(Photo Left) We were surrounded by the Great and the Good, including **Sir David Lumsden** (L), former Principal of the Royal Academy of Music in London who, like 'our' David (R), was lining up for drinks.



(Photo Right) Towards the end of the meal **Justin Miller** joined us (for he had been sitting in the other half of the marquee with the three cathedrals' staff). He was full of beans and we agreed to meet for tea that afternoon...



(Photo Left) ... which we did, and Justin brought with him another American organist friend, **John Alexander** from North Carolina who, like so many American music students, was embarking on a PhD course.

Justin shared with us his excitement at being so closely involved with Winchester Cathedral for the past few months (for his predecessor had recently been appointed as No. 2 at Gloucester Cathedral).

And Justin was about to take up his next appointment as No. 3 at Worcester Cathedral where he would be directing a fine volunteer choir of men and boys as well as lots of playing on their new organ. *Congratulations!*

The final concert that night was again devoted to brilliant music to commemorate WWI. It included Britten's *Agnus Dei* from his *War Requiem* – the superb

tenor soloist, as for all the soloists that week – save a delightful (lady) soprano – came from Winchester Cathedral Choir. He, like Peter Pears, for whom it was written, seemed to sing it effortlessly, and oh so musically.

David, Ruth and I again had near-front seats and when I was talking about Justin to them the lady on my other side said that she sang in a Winchester Cathedral voluntary choir which Justin had been conducting. 'We all love him,' she said, 'for he is so gifted and knows exactly how to get what he wants from us to produce the best music.' She added that she had read all the 30 choirtraining articles that I had written during the course of some ten years for *The Organists' Review*. This again surprised me that yet another person I was sitting next to had heard of me. Very nice!

We were mightily impressed by *Three Prayers of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* by **Philip Moore**, former DoM of York Minster.

It was a longish work, contemporary in style but which held together so cohesively and kept our attention throughout.

The final work, conducted by Winchester's highly gifted DoM, **Andrew Lumsden** (son of Sir David and Lady Sheila Lumsden) was Haydn's *Nelson Mass* which was superb and the applause was again loud and long – bringing to a triumphant end a superb and ever-memorable Southern Cathedrals Festival.

Our thanks and praise to the three cathedral Directors of Music, **Sarah Baldock** (Chichester), **David Halls** (Salisbury) and **Andy Lumsden**. We had been greatly enriched and mightily inspired.

