

# Blackburn Cathedral Music & More Online Supplement No. 23b

## OUR NEWLY REBURBISHED SONG SCHOOL Before & After

# Schola Cantorum

On Sunday September 15<sup>th</sup> 2013, after the 10.30 Eucharist, the cathedral congregation, led by clergy and choir, went down the cathedral's North East steps to see the new Song School, the *Schola Cantorum* (School of Singing) which had just been totally refurbished at a cost of £225,000, thanks in large part to the munificence of **Mr. JOHN BOOTH**.

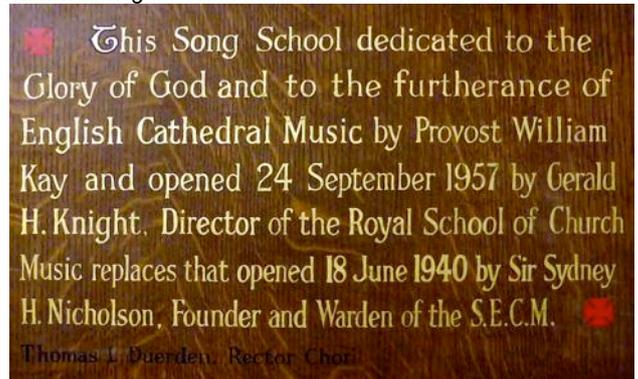


The 1957 TLD entrance passage, which was improved in 1974 by choirmen **David Rothwell** and **Derek Crompton** to designs by JB, and which had white tiles laid to define where the choristers should line up before services (which lasted for 39 very busy years) ...

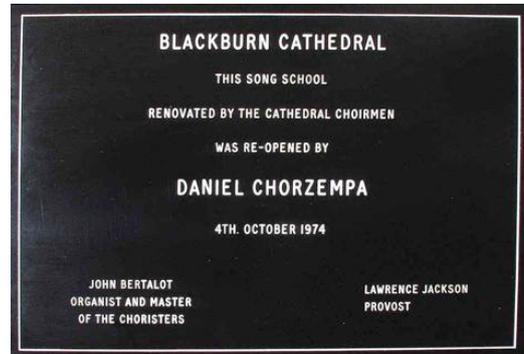
... was now very gracious indeed – lined each side with cubbies for the robes of the boys and girls, and with automatic lighting, and ducted fresh air, like the rest of the new Song School.



Old plaques are displayed on the new walls, which give the history of the Song School when it was moved from its 1940 position in St Mary's House to its present position beneath the North Transept when **T. L. Duerden** was Organist and Master of the Choristers ...



...and a smaller plaque to commemorate its major DIY face-lift in 1974:



The 1974 vestry (with 2012 organ scholar **James Kealey**), showing the ceiling-high library and some of the choristers' robes cupboards:



and the new vestry (with 2013-14 choral Scholar **Christopher Davies**) showing the men's vestry at the far end with their own toilet, stairs to



the library on a new mezzanine floor, toilets for girls and boys, and windows and light everywhere, and with glass doors on the right leading into the new Song School.

## History!

It must be remembered that TLD worked miracles in those far-off years (1939-64), for there was no spare money to create Song Schools and so everything that was done, had to be done 'in house' with willing volunteers – and that was also true during **JB's** time (1964-82). It was only when **Richard Tanner** came (1998-2011) that finance began to be received more regularly for concerts and choir desks and pianos.

**Harold Fielding** (grandfather of current Head Chorister William Fielding) was a woodcutter machinist, following in his father's footsteps. Peter Fielding (Harold's son) said that all the Fieldings were joiners or carpenters. And so Harold created the original adjustable choir desks which first appeared in the first TLD Song School in 1940, which was in St. Mary's House. (In those days it was called The Lower House, but JB changed it when he lived there for a few years from c. 1968.)



These lightweight music desks served gallantly for over half a century ...

... through the 1974 face-lift when the design on the floor of the Song School was the cathedral's coat of arms – a pierced winged heart.

*This represents the Virgin Mary for Simeon said to her in the temple, 'A sword shall pierce through thy own soul' (Luke 2.35).*



This floor lasted until 2005 when the Song School was flooded, and so a new, plain blue, floor was laid.

This also coincided with the replacement of the 1940 Fielding Music Desks with new ones, which

were generously donated by many good folk (at £500 each) – with plaques on each desk inscribed with the names of the donors.



Our 2012-13 organ scholar/librarian **James Kealey** looks at the former ceiling-high choir library (which was initiated in 1974 by Messrs Rothwell and Crompton with shelves of reasonable height) – but as new music was continually being added, so the shelves got progressively higher until librarians almost had to wear parachutes when exploring the upper shelves!

But now we have a brand new library on its own mezzanine floor – with ample



room for all the music not only for the cathedral choirs but also for the Renaissance Singers. Here 2013-14 organ scholar/librarian **Karen Au** shows how easy it is to reach all the music. (By the way, new boxes have been ordered to house the music, so it will shortly look even more impressive and efficient!)

## Living History Today!

The congregation flooded into the new Vestry and Song School on Sunday, September 15th, for its dedication by the Dean. They filled the passage, the vestry and even the Song School itself:





...and the choirs took their place in the Song School ready to sing Bruckner's *Locus iste* directed by **Samuel Hudson**.

And then the choir sang *Locus iste a Deus factus est* (*This place was made by God*) and from a new window on the mezzanine floor your photographer captured this superb view of them all.



On the walls of the Song School are the handsome plaques, which were in the former Song School, listing the names, written in gold, of all the **Choir Prefects** from 1923 to the present day – with room for many more names. The Girls Prefects' Board was a parting gift from **Richard Tanner**.

Also included are the names of all the **Cathedral Directors of Music** from 1926 to the present day, and a plaque with the names of **Senior Old Choristers** from 1969. (Given by OC **John Marr** in memory of his Mother.) *The SOC scheme was begun when the Old Choristers' Association wished to honour one of its members each year.*

Standing next to the **Dean**, (*centre, below*) by the stairs to the mezzanine library, is the major donor, **Mr. John Booth**, to whom we owe this transformation. Thank you indeed.



Written in large letters in the new vestry are the words:  
**Schola Cantorum**  
 and below are the words:  
**Sing ye praises with understanding.**

This clearly defines the reason for our fine cathedral music – not only to sing it beautifully, but more than that, to sing the music so that the meaning of the timeless words is clearly proclaimed, not only to the singers themselves, but also to all who hear them.

*Samuel Hudson pointed out that the capital S is upside down!*



The photographs of former organists and choirmasters of Blackburn Parish Church/Cathedral, (from **Henry Smart** in 1832 to



**Richard Tanner with Pippa** in 2011) which adorned the former Song School, will shortly be re-hung in our new Song School so that all our singers and organists may realize afresh that they are the latest in a long line of dedicated musicians who have served this place so faithfully for 200 years.

### Does your son or daughter sing?

If so, we're sure you'd love them to be considered for membership of the Cathedral Choir – **where tuition in music, worth £1,000 a year, is given free!** So please contact, without obligation, the Director of Music, Mr Samuel Hudson:

01254-50-30-82

[Samuel.hudson@blackburncathedral.co.uk](mailto:Samuel.hudson@blackburncathedral.co.uk)