

BLACKBURN CATHEDRAL

Friends of Blackburn Cathedral Music

Newsletter No. 3

and

Blackburn Cathedral Old Choristers

Association

Newsletter No. 12

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The Bishop of Blackburn, the Right Reverend **ALAN CHESTERS**, recently announced that he will be retiring from the diocese on August 31st. Bishop Alan came to Blackburn in 1989, succeeding Bishop Stewart Cross. He will be, therefore, the second longest serving Bishop of Blackburn after Bishop Herbert, our first Bishop, who served here from 1926-1942.

Bishop Alan's commanding presence and authoritative voice have been greatly appreciated. There is always a 'sense of occasion' when he is present at a cathedral service which makes it special for everyone. His resonant tones have also been heard in the House of Lords and he's been closely involved in both secular and religious projects throughout Lancashire. And, of course, many are the choristers both from the cathedral and the diocese, who are proud to be called Bishop's Choristers. He and Jenny will be sorely missed.

His work in the parishes, if one may say so, has been outstanding. For example, he conducted his last Confirmation service in Fence Church in March – the exact 53rd anniversary of his own confirmation! What he said,

and the way he said it, and the loving concern he showed for all of us, were truly amazing. His abounding good humour both during the service and afterwards made it a most special experience for us all which we shall long remember with great thanksgiving.

The farewell service to **Bishop Alan and Jenny** will be held in the cathedral on Saturday, 19th July at 11.00 am. Admission will be by ticket only.(01254-51491)



Bishop Alan standing before the portrait of Bishop Stewart, his predecessor, in the cathedral crypt.

Choristers' Visit to Disneyland by William, Edward and Denise Sanderson

As the boys had not had a choir tour in 2002, a trip to Disneyland, Paris, was arranged for the period between Christmas and New Year. Forty-nine bleary eyed choristers and their families boarded a coach at 6 am in the Swallow Hotel car park



Organiser Denise Sanderson

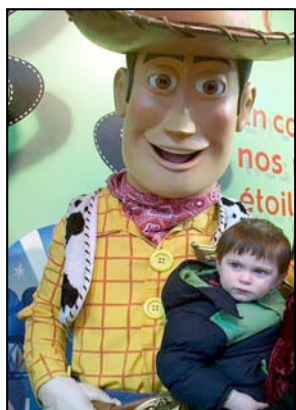
Around 14 hours later we arrived at our hotel on the outskirts of Paris. The boys had spent the entire journey in good humour, exchanging seats and mixing well.



We arrived at Disneyland just as it was opening and stayed until it closed 12 hours later. At first there was a slight drizzle but this soon cleared, leaving quite a pleasant day. Most of the boys were keen to leave the adults behind and hurried off to find the fastest rides. There was a wide range of rides in the park, most were for the adults (roughly 2 mph to avoid injuries!), there were some rides which you could get really wet on and others a really bad head.



The best ride in the park was Space Mountain which cork-screwed twice and left your head ringing so badly that at the time you forgot how many times it had looped. It was a good day and both the boys and the adults enjoyed themselves. Super!



Woody loved meeting James Tanner!

Our final day was spent sight-seeing in Paris city centre culminating in a cruise on the River Seine. A long tiring journey to dull England saw us arriving back at the Swallow Hotel at midnight. A great time was had by all, new friendships were made and old ones strengthened.

Thanks goes to Mr. Tanner for making sure that the boys did not starve!

And thanks to Mrs. Sanderson who did such a fabulous job to organise the trip! Ed.

OLD CHORISTERS' Letters to the Editor

From former Blackburn Assistant Director of Music, **BEN SAUNDERS**, now Director of Music of Leeds RC Cathedral and the Diocese of Leeds.

News wise, well things at the cathedral are going well, and all the children's choirs are very over

subscribed - I've had to cap them all at 30 members. Therefore I am expanding singing in the diocese of Leeds as the cathedral side is full up, and will be starting a boys' choir in Harrogate late Feb. and a Bradford Youth Choir mid summer term.

I took the cathedral senior girls (ages 12-16) and adult choirs to Huddersfield Town Hall and conducted them with **GORDON STEWART** playing the organ - its was a superb day. We got a very nice review that mentions us both.

My new employers, the RC Diocese of Leeds and St. Anne's Cathedral, continue to invest heavily in music-making for young people. We advertise for an assistant director of music next week in the Times Higher Ed Supplement. *[Ben's new assistant will be paid as much as some Anglican Cathedral Directors of Music! Ed.]*

I've one more week here then off to Texas Christian University (I think they are famous for baseball!) to talk about choral music with children and do an organ recital in their concert hall. Also performing at the Cathedral of the Incarnation, Dallas.

The Diocese of Leeds and its Cathedral Church have one of the fastest growing programmes of choral music in the country, so Ben's secretary tells me. Ben was appointed there in 2002 after holding posts at Downing College Cambridge, St. Giles Cathedral, Edinburgh and Blackburn and Chester Cathedrals.

From **OC Dr. SIMON ('Walt') DANIELS:**

Good self and Mr. & Mrs. **IAIAIN THOMPSON** passed your front door last Saturday afternoon... (you were out). This is a new branch of BCOCA.....which regrettably neglects singing in favour of a pub lunch (at the Trader's Arms), a couple of pints of Thwaites, and (on this occasion) a very dull couple of hours at Ewood Park. Still...it was very nostalgic, and threatens to be a bi-annual event.

From **OC JAMES THOMAS**, former Blackburn Asst. Organist, now Director of Music of St. Edmunsdbury Cathedral.

Thanks for editing another splendid Friends' Newsletter. I take exception to only one thing, i.e. Jonathan Edwards's assertion that Chelmsford and Blackburn are the only towns to have Cathedrals: not so!!

Best wishes from the Cathedral Church of St James in the town of Bury St Edmunds!
James

Letter No. 1 from **OC PETER HEALD** in Ely:

Just a thought - if you haven't had it already - what about a sort of BCOCs' **'Where are they now?'** column? I could contribute for starters the **GRADWELL** brothers, **BOB** and **PETER** - both dentists and one of whom worked on my mouth - **CHRIS KINGSTON**, took holy orders and was Vicar or Priest-in-Charge of Knuzden, I think - **GEORGE WOODHOUSE**, my era - **MALCOLM WILLETS** (I know where he is and I'm working on him).

IAN HOLLIN 'phoned for a chat yesterday - he has pencilled Sept 13/14 in ink in his diary for our Reunion.

Nice news - **Constance** has just received her long-overdue invite to the Buck House Garden Party in July. Sadly, I cannot 'obble along with her but she has invited sister Dorothy as her consort. They just can't wait to start talking *hats and things*.

All for now. Hope the seasonal bugs are avoiding you - and will do in September. Must re-establish contact with **BRYAN LAMB**. And a sad note - aircraft activity increasing to and from the USAF bases at RAF Lakenheath and Mildenhall. What next?

From **OC CHRIS HUNWICK** in Liverpudde, where he's pursuing an MA in highrowgliffix.

Thank you for the magazine - it is a good read, with a not entirely unexpected entry, but a very flattering one, about me. I must be quite high up the **NAME IN BOLD** charts by now!

Good news about the Anglican Cathedral deputyship; I went along for an audition the other week and sang in on a service and a practice. **Ian Tracey** said that he didn't need to hear any more and put me down on the dep. list (as it happens, I haven't been called up yet). I had a good chat with him afterwards, and he sends his regards.

Congrats, Chris – Ian obviously knows Good Thing when he sees it.

Two Massive Letters from **OC STEPHEN WARD** (a contemporary of **BRIAN EDMUNDSON**, and **JOHN MARR**.) *You'll need a reviving drink if you can get through these in one sitting – they're great! This is what they looked like in 1974 – immediately after a concert tour of Holland and North Germany:*



Brian Edmundson, Stephen Ward & John Marr in 1974

STEPHEN WARD'S FIRST LETTER

I've been meaning to email you for ages for you were one of the most profound influences on my life (thanks to **NORMAN ECCLESTON**, a founder member of BCOCA), I've always found it difficult to know what to say to you! Obviously, I've always had my mum's strong love of music -- but, without your influence, I don't think I'd have ever had the courage to take the helm of the choirs in Darwen and Blackburn that I did after leaving the Cathedral. (Sadly, my work keeps me too busy, nowadays, to play such an active part... -- although we are blessed with a very active music scene here in Cheltenham!)]

Anyway -- how the heck are you? My dad -- when he bumped into you and **DEREK CROMPTON** in the Cathedral last year -- said you were looking very well, which is great news.

It was sad to hear about **GEOFFREY WILLIAMS**, and then **LAWRENCE JACKSON** -- although it was good to hear from **BRIAN NEWTON** that this was balanced with the birth of Lucy Jackson's son, Benjamin. [My mum sent me The Times' obituary for the Provost... -- and I have to say I'm not so sure if I really recognized the man described: but it certainly brought back many memories!]

BRIAN also sent me *The Organs of Blackburn Cathedral* that you helped to put together. Gosh... -- sounds (excuse the pun ;-)) like it's been just as exciting over the last year or two as it was when the organ was originally put in! I remember, on one of my first visits to the cathedral, you leading a group of us through the screens and scaffolding, and you picking up one of the serpents, putting it to your lips, and actually managing to make a noise with it (although you did turn a strange shade of purple at the time...)! (I've often thought you must have used a trumpet or French horn mouthpiece... -- but I was still very impressed!)

Reading through the newsletter again -- so many names that I remember! Strange to see a mention of **TLD**, though. As you'll remember, we used to live a few doors down from Tommy on Wellington Street (St. John's); and my 12-year-old son, Miles, still has the 1910 Bechstein upright that TLD so kindly gave to my mum when he retired from piano teaching. I sometimes think TLD's ghost still blesses the piano -- as Miles recently gained a distinction in his Grade II piano exam -- beating his poor dad by a significant number of points!

Amongst the many names, **PHILIP CARR** seems not to have aged; neither does **DEREK CROMPTON** (although maybe he's put on a little

weight (like myself); and maybe there's a little less on top (ditto?)!

FRED DEWHURST doesn't appear to have changed a jot either... -- which is remarkable, considering he was teaching at QEGS when my dad was still a pupil there! He also taught *_me_* English, when I was at QEGS in the 1970s! Wow!

My dad still keeps in touch with **RONNIE** and **Barbara FROST**. Philippa, Miles and I are hoping to be in Lancashire over half-term. Are you going to be at home? I'd love to meet up with you, even if only briefly. Let me know -- it would be a great thrill!

Best and warmest wishes...

Stephen R Ward

[TLD's house in Wellington St. St. John's is now owned by Blackburn's MP – Jack Straw! Ed.]

STEPHEN WARD'S SECOND LETTER

Thanks for the latest edition of the Newsletter... -- which continues to make me realize just how much I miss the Cathedral and church music, in general...!

Whilst I was still in the YPC in the early 1980s, I was asked by a colleague in Blackburn's Music Society to take over the choirmaster's role at St Peter's, Salesbury (always a tough job: it being the **Bishop of Blackburn's** 'local', as it were -- not to mention Martin Roscoe's... ;-). I must admit I was (i) flabbergasted; and (ii) scared witless - - never having done much more than rehearsing the YPC for various short anthems I'd written.

However, I had a great time there, having had a great predecessor in Alan Southern (who did a wonderful job of building the choir up...), and with Eric Pountain (the vicar -- very musical, and willing to let us enlarge our repertoire) always there with encouragement. It also helped having the wonderful Jim Kennedy (then Director of Finance for Blackburn Council) as organist -- as it's got to be said that I have the hand-eye-and-foot coordination of a sponge (...although this did improve a little -- out of necessity -- having learned to play all sorts of stuff for weddings: including Widor's Toccata, for some friends.

[This was in a church in Salisbury, Wilts, (thankfully not the cathedral!); and I was so scared at messing it up for my friends in front of so many people, that I spent hours one night at St Peter's practising and practising until I could play it without looking at the music, and without worrying what my feet were doing! Much to the consternation of the locals, it has to be said: as I hadn't realized just how late it had become -- and was interrupted by a couple of police officers at 1 o'clock in the morning -- who had to bang on the door for several minutes to gain my attention...(!); and who had been called because there were lights on in the church, and so much noise...!!!]

We used to borrow the odd person from the YPC -- notably **HEATHER STARKEY** and **ANNA STUTTARD** to supplement the choir on occasions; but the St Peter's bunch were a great group of people to work with -- and it was a great learning experience (...and made me realize how much I'd absorbed from **JB**, **RONNIE FROST**, **KEITH**

BOND, **JACK LONGSTAFF**, **FRED DEWHURST** and Horace Tattersall -- what a roll-call!!!)

Because of this, I ended up also leading the Newrad Singers in Darwen, and the Darwen Girls' Choir for a while -- even taking part (and winning prizes!) in various local music festivals. I even wrote various bits of music for all 'my' choirs -- as well as quite a few songs for the Alexander Singers (run by Sylvia Alexander). But, sadly, eventually, the pressures of employment made it just too difficult to keep all these balls in the air.

I now work as a senior communication consultant for Hewitt Bacon & Woodrow Ltd: part of the American firm, Hewitt Associates LLC -- a technology-driven human resources management consultancy. My job basically consists of designing and implementing employee communication programmes and strategies worldwide (often electronically, involving a lot of writing on my part...) for large, blue-chip organizations.

My wife, Philippa, is a principal lecturer (and author -- having recently co-written a book with her father, Professor Barry Davie) in marketing and strategy at Gloucestershire Business School -- part of the new University of Gloucestershire, here in Cheltenham.

Miles (after Miles Davis and Benjamin Britten...!), our son, is 12, taller than either of us (at nearly six foot, already...!); a stalwart of one of his school's rugby teams (Pate's Grammar, also in Cheltenham), and currently experimenting with all types of music -- including learning to play the piano and electric guitar! (Philippa says he has her singing skills, though -- so no Allegri top-Cs for him, I'm afraid!)

Anyway, I should stop gabbling, and let you know I'm really, really looking forward to seeing you again.

Best wishes... Stephen R Ward



Well, Steve did come to visit JB – bringing copies of JB's choirtraining books to autograph ('I wish I had them when I was starting out,' said Steve. 'So do I!' replied JB. They're available from the Cathedral Bookshop!) Your photographer took the opportunity to permanentize the moment with a photograph of Steve,

not only with a Union Jack coming out of his head, AND a Stars and Stripes, but also a pretty wholesome halo around his shorn locks!

Steve hopes to come to our Reunion on 13-14th September. Are you coming?

GORDON SHAW, who's the grandfather of six (!) girls – is very keen that the young (and the more experienced!) ladies of our choirs, present and past, shall join with us for our **GRAND REUNION on Saturday – Sunday, 13th-14th September**. Many of our younger men OCs will be with us (i.e. those who have recently graduated from the boys' choir to the YPC) as well as college students, and older members. We sing Evensong together on the Saturday – creating a superb choir – then we enjoy a terrific dinner (FREE to those who come for the first time!). Book it now and make sure your contemporaries join you!

From **OC RUPERT DUCKWORTH in Oz**,

I'm busy with going back to university (M.Sc. in Environmental Management) and last ops to re-build (plastic surgery on skin graft donor sites) my arm after the car crash two and a half years ago! One of life's little tests. My going back to university is only possible thanks to the support of my wife Chrissie and my parents. The pressure is on, in many ways to graduate in style and with honours to repay their kindness!

We should be making one if not several trips to the UK next year for 70th birthdays (Pa and Chrissie's father), 40th wedding anniversaries, weddings . . . the list goes on so we'd like to meet up and say G'day.

Rupert Duckworth

Metago Environmental Engineers
SOUTH PERTH, Western Australia 6151

Second letter from **OC PETER HEALD** in Ely:

Just received the February Newsletter, Congratulations. I haven't had time to read it properly yet - I'm a bit busy with my new job as Consultant Managing Editor of Blackie & Co, the publishing house. The consultant bit means I can work from home, apart from one or two literary lunches, etc - and I can choose my own hours. It's fascinating stuff and keeps me more than occupied.

ORGAN RECITALS



RICHARD TANNER arranged a marvellous series of lunchtime organ recitals – given by a galaxy of British & Welsh Cathedral Organists.

These attracted large and appreciative audiences. The organ, generally, behaved itself.

But when **SCOTT FARRELL**, organist of Newcassal Cathedral, gave his recital, the Great organ refused to co-operate.

CANON HINDLEY, and Michael Leadbeater from Wood's organ works, spent a long time on their knees trying to trace the fault – to no avail. (See photo, below, of Scott patiently watching the kneeling couple.)

(Perhaps they should have been kneeling in the opposite direction? Prayer changes things!) But, because Scott played so brilliantly, no-one noticed the Great lack.

COLIN WALSH, the distinguished organist of Lincoln Cathedral, who gave a brilliant lunchtime recital in our cathedral in February, wrote: 'What an instrument – it's awesome – and just what we want at the West end of Lincoln Cathedral!'

Colin also wrote a poem in praise of our organ:
*The organ at Blackburn is one of the best,
From a thundering 'Serpent' to a 'Viola Céleste';
But to make any sense in that huge ambiance
Your cleanest articulation will be put to the test!'*
Irregular metre!

OLD CHORISTERS' NEWS

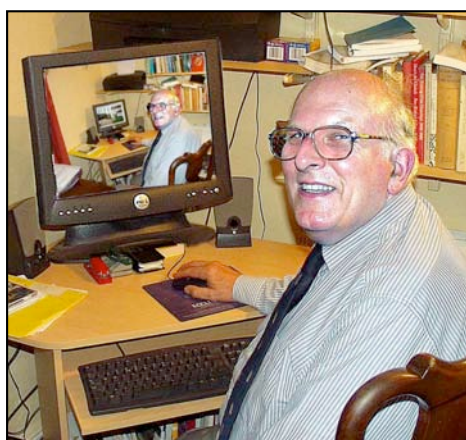
Your Foreign Correspondent ventured south in February to stay with **DAVID & LIZ FRAYNE** who live in a picture-postcard cottage deep in the heart of Dorset (turn left at Stonehenge and straight on until morning).

David arrived home 10 seconds after JB was trying to back his car into the Fraynes' garden (that's timing for you) – he was returning from his weekly cello lesson. I was mightily delighted that he plays regularly with the *Sturminster Newton Orchestra Workshop* (SNOW for short) and the *Sherborne St. Paul's Church Orchestra*, which rehearses every week and plays for monthly services in that lovely church. Wow! David and Liz gave me a short recital, as Liz's piano was open and David's cello was ready warmed – I was impressed!



They both keep very busy – David was heavily involved in organizing the recent Stewardship campaign for his local church, he conducts weddings and funerals in some of the village churches which litter that exquisite part of Rural England, he's Chairman of This and That, and he's been invited to give the addresses on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday Three Hours services in Bristol Cathedral. He and Liz are, of course, very well known in Bristol, for he was Vicar of St. Mary Redcliffe in that fair City – the church which Queen Elizabeth 1st described as "the goodliest, fairest and most famous parish church in England".

David also delights in his computer and digital camera (a present from his many friends in Blackburn Cathedral when he retired two years ago). Your Reporter marvelled at the tidiness of his office and His Very Reverence's skill in handling his new toy.



OC IAN HARRISON, organist of the magnificent church of St. Stephen in Bournemouth, (where Whitlock was organist) has arranged yet another superb Annual Whitlock Festival, 1-3rd May. Stars include the choir of Chichester Cathedral, The Dean of Winchester, Dr. Francis Jackson playing his 5th Organ Sonata – commissioned for the festival – and so much more. If you've got that weekend free, it's very well worth your while to go down there to enjoy it all. Contact the Booking Office, 21 Alyth Road, Bournemouth, BH3 7DG

OC WILLIAM HEAP blew in to see the editor at the end of January – and to have his photo taken with a Union Jack coming out of his hand instead of his head (see our last two Newsletters!). Does he frequent the



same barber as Stephen Ward?

Will lives in the Isle of Person and works for Barclays Bank – dealing with 'the rich and famous all over the world, including footballers', so he told the editor. He lives with his wife and daughters in a tiny hamlet (only 12 houses) halfway up a mountain in the depths of the Isle: 'It's lovely to wake up and hear the birds and also the river,' he said, 'but it's also good to come back to the mainland, to visit Mum and Dad in Mellor. We took the girls to see the Lion King in London.- it was terrific.'

[It was terrific to see you again Will – with your no-hair haircut. Looking forward to seeing you at our Reunion in September. Ed.]

Re **OC DAVID CLAYDON**.

David has now joined the Army and is currently at Sandhurst having left St Andrew's University in the Summer. His Mum wrote that all the discipline involved in being a Chorister has obviously had a lasting effect as he couldn't have chosen a more discipline-orientated career !

From **OC JOHN KEEN**

Thanks for the recent lengthy newsletter. Very intrigued to see **GRAHAM DEAN** making a nostalgic appearance and glad that he's been located. Yes I seem to recall him being quite a footballing talent in his youth. I particularly remember Graham flaunting his ball control skills in between rehearsals during the 1981 RSCM course at Canterbury Cathedral (think there was a BCOCA gang of about 6 on that trip under the leadership of Philip Moore - is he still at York Minster? [*Yes. Ed.*])

Very sorry to hear the sad news about the loss of **CANON WILLIAMS** and **LAWRENCE JACKSON**. They were both part of everyday life at the Cathedral and will be greatly missed. As a small chorister it always seemed daunting to have to recite in their presence the Creed / General Thanksgiving (etc) as part of the structured progression up through the ranks. I seem to remember Canon Williams would be forgiving enough to offer a second opportunity if things went awry and he was always generous enough to award 8 or 9 out of 10 for a polished re-run.

I look forward with interest to watching the Advent Carol service on Songs of Praise this Sunday. I trust the purple cassocks will be on full display.

Yes, there were six Blacburnians on the 1981 RSCM Canterbury Course – **PETER & IAN BANKS, ANDREW ANDERSON, CHRIS**

BIRCHALL, GRAHAM DEAN and, of course, **JOHN KEEN**.

PETER wrote in the 1981 choir magazine: "Mealtimes were interesting. Spontaneous singing erupted whilst waiting for meals, including such gems as the National Anthem, Land of Hope and Glory, Rule Britannia (for some foreign singers in our midst who came from a former Colony) liberally mixed with close harmony, and also well known hymns in 4 to 10 parts with Blackburn tap-room endings.' [A tap room ending was a spontaneous descant at the very ends of some hymns – with trebles sailing up to top Gs and above, when they felt like it. Canon Williams did not approve! Ed]

Here's a photo of **IAIAIAN THOMPSON** and **PETER BANKS** – taken by **Dr. SIMON ('Walt') DANIELS**, shortly after they graduated from the boys' to the men's choir. They haven't changed!



A large, intelligent and appreciative audience enjoyed an hilarious evening in the cathedral crypt of words and music inspired, and occasionally by, Shakespeare, in February. It was presented by the Cathedral Drama Group, led by churchwarden (and former choir parent) **Keith Banks**, and the Renaissance Singers conducted by **RICHARD TANNER**.

We heard delicious music by composers as varied as Rutter, Finzi, Stanford and Cornyshe – and we heard some of our stalwarts in unaccustomed roles:

RICHARD TANNER, for example, sang mellifluously Schubert's *Who is Sylvia?*

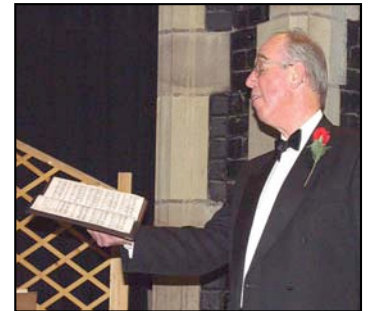


Keith Banks gave us a lively extract from 'Kiss me Kate' ('Brush up your Shakespeare'.)

GORDON SHAW took ten minutes to explain what Schubert was getting at when he wrote 'Hark, hark, the lark'.

("It only takes a minute to sing, so I'll sing it twice!") It was hilarious!

Also hilarious were some skits presented by our cathedral actors: including extracts from GCE exam papers: 'Shakespeare was born in 1564, supposedly on his birthday.' 'Romeo's last wish was to be laid by Juliet!'



Richard told your music critic, 'We're rather short of sopranos tonight, most of them are having babies!' But the three who were not contributing to the population explosion did jolly well!

DAVID BRIGGS, our consultant for the rebuilding of the Blackburn Cathedral organ, and world organ virtuoso, told your editor what happened in the interval when he was giving a recital,

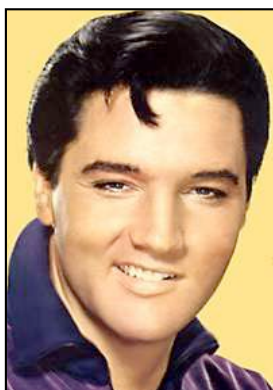


recently, in a nearby city:

"I was playing at ***** Town Hall on Saturday night (dodgy organ, but never mind). At the intermission some guy came up to the CD stall and said, in a massively brummy accent "Yow know, Doivid, it's such a woonderfull privilidge to have yow 'ere, loik. Can yow do us a favour and sign some CDs? And can Oi take foirve photographs, two with me in as well?"

DB (posh accent) "No problem, sir, I would be delighted to oblige!" The bloke got out 4 **Elvis Presley** CDs and said "Ere yow are, Doivid, Oiv even brought my special fluorescent blue pen". I said "Sorry, sir, have I got you right? You would like me to sign these **Elvis** CDs?" "That's roite" he said, "it's such a PRIVILIDGE to 'ave you 'ere."

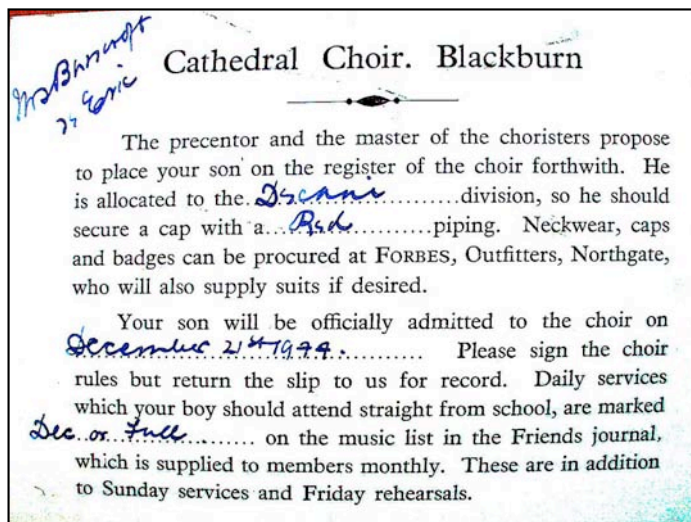
"So I duly signed them on the front, and felt like a complete burke. Then he said "Yow've really changed your style, ain't yu - do yow loike it? Yow play very different now, don't yow?"



By this time I was pretty confused, until he turned over the CD cover, and showed me 'my' name. Evidently Elvis had a keyboard player in the 1950s (in Memphis) called DAVID BRIGGS! This Elvis fan had come to the concert on Saturday thinking I was DAVID BRIGGS, continuo supporter to **Elvis Presley!**

"It's pretty much the most wonderful thing that's happened at an interval CD signing, ever! If I had really had my wits about me, I should have said: 'Oh, by the way, you know Elvis IS still with us. He's just in hiding. We had lunch together only last week!'"

OC ERIC BANCROFT lent your reporter the card he was given when he joined the cathedral choir in 1944. Wow! That's TLD's neat handwriting.



MEMORIES OF 'TLD'

Mr. Thomas L. Duerden, Mus. Bac.,
Organist and Master of the Choristers
of Blackburn Cathedral, 1939-64
*from a booklet published by BCOCA
and available from the cathedral office*

Episode 2

HALF A CENTURY AGO

by **OC Squadron Leader BRYAN LAMB**
who joined the cathedral choir as a boy in 1942
and served in the RAF



Although being firmly under the thumb of the system, there was much fun to be had as a choirboy in the Cathedral choir in the early 1940s. We played hide and seek in the gloomy recesses of the half-built cathedral extensions, left untouched since the beginning of the War. This was forbidden but of course we took no notice, so long as there wasn't any chance of being found out.

We laughed a lot too. Not realising that our growing knowledge of the Psalter was instruction in our Anglican cultural heritage; it was to us more of a bumper fun book. Secretive giggles would greet the well-known phrases when they came round again in the monthly cycle (for, in those days, we regularly sang all the psalms of the day). 'Moab is my washpot', 'God is gone up with a merry noise', 'The King's daughter is all glorious within', 'Neither delighteth he in any man's legs', and 'There goes that Leviathan,' (TLD had served briefly in the Royal Navy on HMS Leviathan, a distinction of which we were regularly reminded.)

PETER FIELDING was a great giggler in these circumstances, but **ALLAN HOLDEN** was

probably the champion. You only had to catch his eye on the other side at the right moment, and a bright red paroxysm would ensue as he tried to control the near-hysteria brought on by the joke, whilst trying to keep a straight face at the same time. Naturally we hoped that this unseemly hilarity would go unnoticed by the management, but the boss (TLD) didn't miss much, and at rehearsals he would sometimes join in the fun, provided the implications were not too outrageous. Having a **LAMB** and a **HAMM** in his flock always amused him. The regular prayer book references to Lambs, ranging from the 'Pascal' to the one 'that taketh away the sins of the world' would often produce a broad grin or a witty remark at my expense.

The Cathedral treated us to two outings a year. Just after Christmas the Provost would take us all to the annual pantomime at the nearby Grand Theatre (long since demolished). After the show we would go to a fish and chip restaurant in Northgate for a slap-up tea. I remember the Revd. **WALLACE CLARKE**, the then Precentor, presiding over one of these feasts. He was a highly involved Precentor and was usually at the Friday evening rehearsals. He used to stand with the tenors and sang very well. I retain the most respectful memories of Wallace. He was a truly gentle and wonderful man.

In the summer, TLD would organise the choir trip for the boys, usually a day out in Southport. There would be cricket on the beach, swimming in an indoor pool, and of course plenty of nosh. We always travelled by train. It was still the LMS in those days (London, Midland and Scottish railway). Only the suckers-up would ride with TLD.

The more independent spirits invariably chose a separate compartment where Woodbines would be smoked. When the train stopped en route, we would crowd together at the windows to deter any other would-be passengers from getting in. It always worked.

The Cathedral paid us too – every six months, I think. It was called an honorarium. I didn't really know what that meant, but it translated into money. The first time it was doled out to me, I got three shillings and sixpence! (17 1/2p in present coinage – but worth a lot more in those days.)

In mid 1943 I joined the escape committee at my secondary modern school and got clean away, being promoted in the September to QEGS. TLD was also the part-time music master there. Most of the boys in my form (3D – I was brought up in the idiot stream at QEGS) heartily loathed the one-hour-a-week singing lesson with its emphasis on tonic solfa which few understood, when we had to sing jolly songs like 'Turmot hoeing'! On the other hand, we cathedral choirboys – TLD proteges – appreciated our up-market status in his classes. Naturally we were always given a leading role in the choral performances he arranged for Speech Day every year in King George's Hall.. There was always a good deal of Gilbert and Sullivan, rousing choruses like *Tarantara*. He was great a producing concerts like that. But then, it was his profession.

These teenage years were greatly influence by the presence on the Cathedral staff of the Revd. **RENNIE SIMPSON**, possibly the ultimate natural



The cathedral boys, with TLD, in 1942, in Old Song School, St. Mary's House. Bryan was missing that day

The piano and choirstalls are the same - but in better condition than they are now, as are we all!

Back Row L- R Michael Wilkinson, - - - Cooper, Jack Smethurst, Peter Banks,* Leslie Stone, **Alan Hodson**

2nd Row L- R John Shorrock, **Tom Holden**, **David Robinson** **, Walter Duxbury, Unknown, **Peter Fielding**, Gilbert Hindle, Donald Jose, Desmond Mallinson, **John Highton**

3rd Row L- R Unknown, **Gordon Fielding**, Bob Gradwell, Chris. Kingston, **Ralph Robinson**, Michael Thompson, Charles Hoole, **Geoffrey Taylor**, Ian Aldersley, **Allan Holden**

Front Row L- R John Bancroft, **Eddie Howorth**, Walter Geldart **Heavy type = current lively Old Choristers**

(* not the Peter Banks mentioned in this issue. ** Now retired Archdeacon, but not the David Robinson from Cornwall!

Charmer. He came to us from Yorkshire where he had been curate, with his recently married wife, **Margaret**, a gentle and equally charming lady. They lived in a house behind the old Song School with their dog 'Gone', one of triplets called, Bin, Gone and Dunit. One Sunday afternoon some of us were invited to tea before Evensong. During tea, Gone, having had an illicit liaison with a local pooch, duly went into labour. Except for Rennie, Evensong was a write-off that day as the rest of us mid-wifed the delivery of a dozen or so pups.

Rennie later went on to be a minor canon at Westminster Abbey and a chaplain to The Queen and later became an Archdeacon. For a time we overlapped in London, with me working in the Ministry of Defence in Whitehall, a five-minute walk from the Abbey. It was great to be invited to lunch with such very special people. Rennie was eventually appointed a Commander of The Royal Victorian Order – a personal gift from The Queen.

In September 1945 I had my appendix out and my voice broke; simultaneous occurrences, but probably not connected. I was suddenly out of the choir. As a parting gift, TLD gave me a second-hand book on the life of Mozart, probably from his own bookshelves. I still have it, although I have never read it, but I am still moved by the inscription written inside: "**To Brian Lamb – A member of Blackburn Cathedral Choir for 3 years, 1942-5 – In appreciation of his consistent good service, from Thomas L. Duerden, Organist and Master of the Choir, 22/9/45.**" Not specially glowing perhaps, but good enough for me. The book itself is now in a rather poor shape having been dragged around the world for the past 58 years, but it remains a prized possession.

Part 3 of Bryan's fascinating memoirs will be published in the next Newsletter.

PS: OC RALPH ROBINSON has suggested a competition to fill in the names of the unknown choristers in the TLD photo on page 9 – with two valuable prizes: **A free sponsored walk to Cleethorpes, or free burial at sea with a companion of your choice!** Don't all rush!

RUTH FIELDING, 1937-2003

Many OCs will have heard of the sad death of **Ruth Fielding**, beloved sister of **PETER, PAUL** and **GORDON** and aunt of **ROBERT**. She had been suffering for some time from cancer, but departed this life in peace in February.

DAVID ROBINSON, from Cornwall, sent this moving tribute to Ruth, with which many OCs, who had the privilege of knowing her, will resonate:

This is very sad news. As my music teacher at Cedar Street School, she recommended me to TLD as a ten-year-old in 1961 and I still vividly remember being led through what seemed a warren of corridors in the crypt for

my audition. He played an upright piano while I sang There is a Green Hill ... and the rest is history.

Two particularly fond memories:

Being led, with her classmates, on a carol singing expedition to various pre-arranged addresses on Christmas Eve, 1962. As we left our last port of call, it began gently to snow.

Being invited, along with the Eastham brothers, to the Fielding house (in London Road, I think) to take tea and play Monopoly - my initiation into this popular game.

I won't be able to attend the memorial service but I will be there in heart. Please pass on my condolences to the rest of the family.

David Robinson

The Thanksgiving service for Ruth was held in



the cathedral on Saturday, 15th March, taken most wonderfully, by **Canon Hindley**, who re-minded us that the Fielding family can trace their Blackburn forebears back for 300 years.

Canon Hindley and the portrait of Provost Kay. (Peter, Gordon and Paul were cathedral choristers during the reigns of Provost Kay and TLD, and Robert was a JB chorister)

Fieldings were present in force – 32 of them – coming from as far away as Madrid. **ROBERT**, director of music of Sarum College, Salisbury, played the organ most beautifully, **GORDON** read the lesson, and **PETER** told us about Ruth's wonderful life and how greatly she was loved and admired by all who knew her. **PAUL** sat in the congregation with his latest addition to the Fielding clan, baby **Elizabeth**.



Robert, Peter, Paul & Gordon Fielding

During the service **Hilary & Mark Fielding** played Rachmaninov's *Vocalise* for cello and piano exquisitely (many of us will remember with pleasure the super duo-piano recital Mark gave in the cathedral with his father, **Peter**, a year or so

ago.) It was very good to see **TLD's** daughter, **Celia**, (Mrs. Holme) in the congregation.



John Bertalot, Celia (Duerden) Holme, & Fred Dewhurst
(Fred was cathedral sub-organist with TLD & JB)

Old Choristers were there in force, congregating by the Disabled Toilets during the delicious Reception in the crypt after the service:



L- R: Gordon Shaw, Tony Robinson, Ernie Goner, David Cronshaw, Godfrey McGowan & Ralph Robinson.

(NB: Compare the present-day photos of **Peter & Gordon Fielding**, and **Ralph Robinson** with how they looked as boys 61 years ago in 1942 – page 9. This is History!)

ROBERT FIELDING wrote to JB afterwards: *It was such a privilege to play for Ruth on Saturday. I felt it was Ruth's birthday present to me and that she would certainly be aware of what was happening in some way or another. The organ was sounding splendid and it remains the most exciting instrument to play in the UK*

It was a wonderful morning – and the sun shone upon us all. May Ruth rest in peace.

OC's LETTER from *Chopwood*

Hi J. B

An exceedingly long time no see. Hope you don't mind me sending you this e-mail, but I was in the cathedral today and it brought a lot of memories flooding back.

I am now a service engineer for a local fire extinguisher co. and we have the contract for the cathedral, and it was eerily nostalgic going back into the old choir room and it didn't appear to be too much different from how I remember it I will e-mail again and let you know about all

the memories today brought back. Quite a moving experience

Bye for now **CHARLIE HOPWOOD**
(*'Chopwood'*)

Charlie was one of JB's first new boys way back in 1964, along with Derek Crompton & Co.. It's great to be in touch again.

Dr. Lionel Dakers, 1924-2003

It was with great sadness that we learned of the death of **Dr. Lionel Dakers**, former Director of the RSCM. Lionel visited the cathedral in 1997 as our honoured guest when we hosted the Annual Conference of the National Federation of Cathedral Old Choristers (when **GORDON STEWART** directed the music so brilliantly). Lionel gave an hilarious speech at the dinner which those of us who were privileged to be there will remember with enormous joy.

JB visited Lionel in his lovely home in Salisbury 18 months ago, and took him and **Dr. John Birch** (former organist of Chichester Cathedral and a contemporary of JB as a student at the RCM) out to lunch. JB had a hard job getting a word in edgeways, as John and Lionel spent most of the time swapping witty stories!



JB 1, JB 2 and Lionel Dakers, Salisbury, Oct., 2001

Tributes were paid to LD in the newspapers. One of his most memorable *bon mots* was, *'The only voluntary thing about joining a volunteer choir is the voluntary act of joining. From then on, everything's compulsory!'*

RICHARD TANNER has been spreading his choral expertise far and wide recently – in the most illustrious places. First he produced a CD for the choir of St. Alban's Abbey – then (after a brief visit to Blackburn!) he did the same with the choir of Salisbury Cathedral.

And if that weren't enough, the following



week he zoomed off to produce a CD for Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford,

Richard will be conducting broadcast **Choral Evensong from Blackburn Cathedral on Wednesday, 9th April** – BBC Radio 3 at 4.00 pm. Listen!

HEARTIEST CONGRATULATIONS to **Alexandra** (9) eldest daughter of **OC COLIN YOUNG**, who has just been awarded a scholarship to Chetham's School, Manchester, to study brass and piano. Well done! (**Colin** was a contemporary of **PETER EASTHAM** being one of **TLD's** last Prefects and **JB's** first, way back in 1964.)

CONCERTS GALORE

You must come (if you live anywhere near to Blackburn) to **three very special concerts** which **RICHARD & GREG** have arranged:

St John Passion

The Renaissance Singers
with the Northern Chamber Orchestra and Soloists

Directed by **Richard Tanner**

WEDNESDAY 16th APRIL 2003 7.30pm
AT BLACKBURN CATHEDRAL

TICKETS £10, UNDER 16's FREE AVAILABLE FROM
DERBI. HEVLS TEL 01254 51491 OR GORDON SHAW 01254 812568

- 1 Wednesday, 16th April, **St. John Passion** with our very own **Philippa Hyde** and five other top soloists!
- 2 Saturday, 26th April, **BATTLE OF THE ORGANS** with **David Briggs and Wayne Marshall**. (*This will be a sell out!*)
- 3 Saturday, 17th May, **Poulenc's Organ Concerto** (with **GREG MORRIS**) and **Fauré's Requiem** – Choirs and Orchestra conducted by **RICHARD**.
Tickets from **01254-51491**. 7.30 pm start

WEDNESDAY LUNCHTIME RECITALS on our Magnificent Organ (1.00 pm)

May

- 7 Andrew Earis – Assistant, St. Michael's, Cornhill
- 14 **Matthew Owens** - Edinburgh Cathedral
- 21 David Gibbs – sub organist, Carlisle Cathedral
- 28 Oundle Festival Prizewinner

June

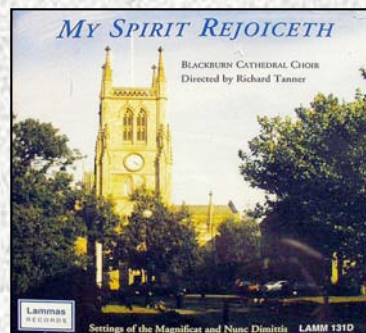
- 4 Stephen Power – organ scholar, Wakefield Cathedral
- 11 **Malcolm Archer** - Wells Cathedral
- 18 Jonathan Meyer – USA, former Oundle Festival Prizewinner.
- 25 **KEITH BOND** (former Blackburn Sub organist) and Gordon Pullin (Tenor)

JB has also been sponsoring and playing a successful series of concerts in his village church – Fence, near Burnley. The church was full for a programme of Bach's organ and choral music, and the audience enjoyed graceful singing by **Derek & Marilyn Crompton**, and **Joan & Philip Hunwick**, (with **JB** playing the organ, projected on to a screen behind the soloists.)



FUTURE FENCE CONCERTS include **JB** and his **New Lancashire Bach Choir** (hand-picked singers from near and far), **RICHARD TANNER** and **Philippa Hyde**, and a spectacular recital to be given by **GORDON STEWART** in concert with his dazzlingly brilliant musical companion, **Anthony Thompson** playing six trumpets. **Tix: £5-00. Call 01282-61-71-59.**

NEWEST CD FROM BLACKBURN CATHEDRAL! *My Spirit Rejoiceth*



Choirs of Blackburn Cathedral
Directed by Richard Tanner
Greg Morris (organ)

8 settings of the evening canticles,
by Smart, Lloyd, Tavener and Howells
and more!

Phone 01254-51491

Senior Old Chorister's PLANT SALE Cathedral Close, South Car Park Saturday, 26th April, 10.00 to 1.00 pm

SOC PHILIP CARR, whose business is horticulture, will be offering a **wealth of pot plants for sale** at mouth-watering prices, to raise money for the redecoration of the Song School