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December 1986

My dear friends &  
relations everywhere  
Happy New Year!

It's pretty clear that I'm not going to get it all in! I've made a list of most of the Happenings of the last twelve months and I think I'll have to leave most of the most out - so if you and I enjoyed some supa times this year and I don't even mention it - please forgive - you will know how good it was and how I appreciated your kindness....

Last year's saga finished with the visit of the choir of King's College, Cambridge to these former-colonial shores, and to Princeton in particular; as a spin-off from that Donald Kruger (who featured in this Newsletter two years ago when he and I, with my cousin, Doug, toured the U.K.) was nearly awarded a choral scholarship to that proud foundation of King Henry 6th - but it was not to be. (EIT, gentle reader, waitnsee). Don had graduated from Princeton University and was about to start his two-years' course for a Master's degree at Westminster Choir College here in Princeton. He wanted somewhere to live and so he moved in to one of my spare rooms, in return for sweeping up the occasional leaf and cutting the odd blade of grass.

October ended in a most happy visit by Vincent Waterhouse, secretary of the Royal School of Church Music, who blew in to Princeton with a friend to take me out to lunch. The friend excused himself for a few minutes whilst drinks were being served to make some telephone calls. He turned up half an hour later having completed his business - four calls to London, two to Geneva, one to Texas and another to Los Angeles! After lunch Vincent and I paid our respects, over coffee, to



Betsy Belshaw, wife of the Bishop of New Jersey - Vincent knows her sister in England. They got on well.

November 1985

A pretty spectacular month - even though Americans don't celebrate Guy Fawkes' night.

1st & 2nd: Directed a retreat for some students from Westminster Choir College - hereinafter called WCC - held in a place called "Paradise" in Pennsylvania. This was a moving experience for me - to talk with music students about Christian things, especially with reference to 'How one can stay a Christian AND be a choirmaster!' (Not easy).

3rd: Took the choir of Men, Boys and Girls - hereinafter called MBG - to sing in two churches in Philadelphia. The second had an enormous organ with THREE 32fts on the pedal. We revelled in those glorious sounds ('cos Trinity organ, tho splendid, has none) and made the most of them during our festal Evensong. Afterwards, over sandwiches and tea in the church rooms the organist told us that they were electronic! Ho hum, thought I, I wonder if we could have a set at Trinity?

4th: Flew to Minnesota to take part in a 5-day conference for Diocesan and Liturgical Music Commissions of the Episcopal Church. Sounds boringly intimidating - but NO! 150 of us from all over the US of A lived in a supa-modern RC convent with great food and magnificent chapel wherein all sorts of well-thought-through services were held, lectures given and ideas exchanged; a high-spot being a service to mark the connection between the diocese of Minnesota



and American Indians. The bishop walked in replete with D.D. robes and crowned with an Indian Chief's head-dress. WOW! At the exchange of the peace an American Indian lit his pipe of peace with due ceremony at the altar and all the priestly participants took a puff; there wasn't a dry eye in the place.

17th: attended the launching of the new hymnal which had been edited by the late Erik Routley; a really splendid book which must eclipse most other new hymnals, for what Erik didn't know about hymnody wasn't worth knowing. This was arranged by Irene Willis (i/c the church music program at WCC and also assoc. org. at Trinity) & held in WCC chapel where he used to teach. Afterwards a few of us were invited to Margaret Routley's home for a celebration:



Irene Willis & Margaret Routley preparing food.

24th: My Princeton Singers, which I founded a year after I arrived here, gave a concert in a lovely church on the N. Jersey shore - we sang WELL - after one of the items we heard the audience gasp - that was 'heavy'! After we sang the final item we were given a standing ovation - that's the first time I've experienced such a reception. We've been asked back for another 'do'.

28th: Don Kruger's parents kindly invited me to celebrate Thanksgiving with them; they live on Long Island (near New York) - a two-hour drive from Princeton. Don and I thought that no-one in their right mind would be driving that day - they'd all be in their homes tucking in to Turkey - but we were WRONG - four hours after setting out from Princeton we arrived - hot, sticky and very hungry having spent more time standing still on the highway than moving. But the journey was worth it!

29th: telephone call: 'Guess who this is' "Dunno" 'Derek Crompton' [from Blackburn Cath. choir]. "When are you coming to see me?"



'Tomorrow!' He did. It was good.

### December

A highlite (?hilight - hilyte) of life at Trinity Church is, believe it or not, the Annual General Meeting. This year's was no exception - illuminating reports, which reflect the deep commitment of all who worship there to the many programs carried out in our service of ministry as the Body of Christ, come thick and very fast - plus touches of humor. The Revd. Jean Smith told of a groom who said, as he slipped the ring on to his Beloved's finger: "I give you this ring as a symbol of my Wow!" The Rector said nice and helpful things about pretty well everything that was going on there, including a remark about our music-making: "Our music and choir program is one of the finest and most profound Christian educational experiences in this parish." (I wrote that down!)

17th: Revd. Jean Smith asked me if I'd like to lead the choirboys' confirmation class again. Would I! I had seven lads who came to the first class highly suspicious, but who quickly came to enjoy our one-hour weekly sessions and who ended up a few months later really enthusiastic about being confirmed. Their parents, too, gave much helpful input - that was a really good experience which helped us all. I'm doing the same this year - the first class was held this morning after church (my only free time in the week) - and two of last year's class have asked to have a brush-up course with our new members.



Helpful thoughts from watching TV:

- (i) When things are going badly for you, can you thank God for trusting you with that situation?
- (ii) When parents or teachers set boundaries for their kids, and the kids promptly step over them, it's not because the kids are 'naughty' but only because the kids want to find out exactly where the boundaries are. (I find that VERY helpful)

Christmas Day was spent in the lovely home of Wyman and Kathy Rolph - two choir parents who, like so many of our choir parents, are very supportive of our Trinity music program. This was a beautiful time for I was welcomed into the gathered Rolph Family - Grandmother, Uncle and resident family. After the gargantuan and most delicious dinner Wyman showed me some of



his priceless collection of books - first editions, original sketches for published illustrations, incredibly beautiful calligraphy, and all bound impeccably and filed in apple-pie order in his spotless bookshelves. That was an Experience!

January 1986

Went to dinner somewhere else and sat next to a young lady who was learning the organ. "What

are you playing at the moment?" I asked, thinking that I had found a twin soul, "Jingle-Bell Rock!" came the answer.

Through the energetic input of Irene Willis, the associate organist at Trinity who also administers the church music program at WCC, I began a series of 40 lectures to grad and undergrad students at WCC on "The History of English Church Music". This I thoroughly enjoyed, even though there were three lectures to prepare every week over and above the work at Trinity. It was interesting also because Don Kruger was one of my students - but we managed to negotiate the delicate line of teacher and taught even though we did live under the same roof. He ended up getting an A+ for his semester's work - well deserved and without 'home help'.

18th: Took down over 200 Christmas cards that had arrived from all corners of the world; thank you, dear friends, for sending me so many - as soon as they arrive (which they do from the beginning of December) I pin them on to my imitation real-wood oak-beams in my sitting room where they can see and be seen, and bless all who enter here.

Among those cards & letters were two pretty amazing ones from friends of Cambridge days; one had just resigned his position as director of music of a large parish church in England to join the congregation of the local Pentecostal church, and the other (a director of music of a large public (i.e. 'private') school) whose whole family had had an 'encounter' with the Lord and whose lives, therefore, had been completely turned around by what had happened and what was continuing to happen in all their lives. To hear them speak about their lives (as I was to do later in the year) was so very stimulating - and also very challenging. How easy it is to lead a 'respectable' Christian life!



23rd: A letter arrived from my new-found cousin Renzo Bertalot in Italy. (You will remember, dear reader, that through a series of amazing coincidences which started when I asked our resident printer at Trinity, Donald Fox, (who was in his final year as a student of Pr. Theological Seminary) where he was going to minister - to which he replied "In the Waldensian Church in Italy" .... this sentence has got out of hand grammatically ... to which I said "Golly, my grandparents were members of that church but I dunno where...." Anyway, Don discovered that I had a real live cousin, Renzo, who was a Pastor of that church and who was secretary of the Italian Bible Society living in Rome. Renzo visited me two months later, and gave me an invitation to visit him and my other cousins in Italy; "Wow, yes!" said I - and plans began to be made. )

Well, Renzo, in this letter, gave me a list of places where I could stay when I came to

see him and Italy in August - plans were hot foot. (One of the greatest blessings and most extraordinary coincidences came when Renzo said, in his initial letter two years ago in which he said we were cousins, "There was a photograph of your grandparents and their children in the house where I grew up." More of this later - if you're still with me.)

As a result of sending my 1985 Newsletter to friends in England I received TWO press-cuttings from the Church of England Newspaper in which there was an account of the new Italian ecumenical Bible which had just been produced under the direction of one "Renzo Bertalot", complete with photograph of "Luca Bertalot" (aged 9) presenting a copy to the Pope. Both friends said "Are these relations of yours?" to which I replied an hearty "Yes! - and I'm going to see them in August."



Young Luca Bertalot presents the new Italian Interconfessional Bible to Pope John Paul II.

Both Protestants and Catholics co-operated in translating the new Bible, which is the result of 7 years' work.

The presentation of the Bible to Pope John Paul II was made by Luca Bertalot, the young grandson of the Italian Bible Society's general secretary Revd Dr Renzo Bertalot.

Pope John Paul replied, "Accept the warmest expression of my grateful appreciation for the result of your efforts.

"The task which you have undertaken is an important moment of collaboration. I ardently desire that it should not pass in vain, but that it truly produce a fertile re-discovery of our common base of origin. In returning to it, the entire Church cannot fail to benefit in rejuvenation, mutual cohesion and effective testimony to the world.



The parents of the boys in my choir confirmation class gave a lot of helpful input: one told me, "There's nothing lovelier than reading the Bible with my son; thank you!"  
(Thank YOU!)

### February...

...saw me gadding around a bit:

To Charlotte, North Carolina, to address the local chapter of the American Guild of Organists on 'how I train hoirkids'. This went well despite my feeling somewhat seedy after a minor repair job in my rear. It's amazing what doctors can do these days - and their professional mixture of good humor and detachment makes it easier to allow them to probe where no-one else has!

I also visited half a dozen churches in the diocese to launch the new Episcopal Hymnal (not Erik Routley's - a pity) which had just been published. This was fun, because in almost every instance the 'launching parish' held a dinner for its members to which I was invited, after which everyone was in a good mood to be done good to and more ready to accept the change which would inevitably come with the introduction of a brand new book after 40 years use of a tried favorite.

29th: Trinity Choirs sang almost all the St. Matthew Passion. This was SUPER. They knew the work well - we had a great orchestra (including a virtuoso string ensemble from Philadelphia), John Kemp, from our own choir, sang the Evangelist (superbly) and rehearsed a number of the soloists himself, and Don Kruger (sweeper of leaves extraordinary) sang Christus. The audience and performers had supper in between the two halves, and everyone, not least the conductor (who had the best 'seat' in the house) was greatly moved. We can't match that experience again for quite a while, so this year our 'big' concert will be Stainer's Crucifixion!

### March

The import of a British Idea to the U.S.A. took root and flourished: the exam for the first Bishop's Awards to choristers was held in our choir room at Trinity. (Bishops' Awards to church musicians were started by the diocese of Blackburn when I went there first, over 20 years ago, through an idea of Martin Haw, a leading luminary of the RSCM. These Awards flourished considerably in the diocese and gradually spread to the rest of the C of E in the You Kay. I expect no less contagion in the (nearly) New World. Some dozen of our choristers entered for the Award, along with a number from other choirs in the diocese; all of ours passed (of course) and most of the others did very well, too. A good start.

The Princeton Singers were developing very nicely thank-you in all sorts of ways. Its (?their) latest improvement was the establishment of a Kommittee (strong, authoritative - 'those who are to be obeyed') who suggested (?decreed) that all members of the Singers should stand throughout rehearsals. Oh dear, that meant that the conductor had to stand, too!.... but it worked, and standards shot up in direct proportion to the square of the limb-aching factor. A small price to pay for increasing excellence.

16th: A bon mot from the Rector (who is given to preaching memorable sermons): "The opposite of sin is not 'goodness', but faith."

That same day a small committee, which had been formed by the Rector to investigate the possibility of adding electronic thirty-twos to our organ, met in the organ loft. After I had explained just what it was I wanted the enlightened chairman (who is a great supporter of our music program in all sorts of wonderful ways) said, "O.K. get on with it!" So I did. Read on.



A monthly delight for me in the life of Trinity Church is to lead a Bible study - held in Gracious Homes of parishioners, preceeded by Afternoon Tea. What a joy that is - socially & spiritually. Those who attend give so much through narrating their own experiences or theological thoughts, and the preparation for these sessions does me a LOT of good!



Two of our hosts for Bible Study: Merlynn Dixon and George Gallup, in Merlynn's house which is in Gallup Road!

George Gallup told us that a recent Gallup poll had discovered that Christians spend twenty-five times more time watching television than they do in prayer!

### April

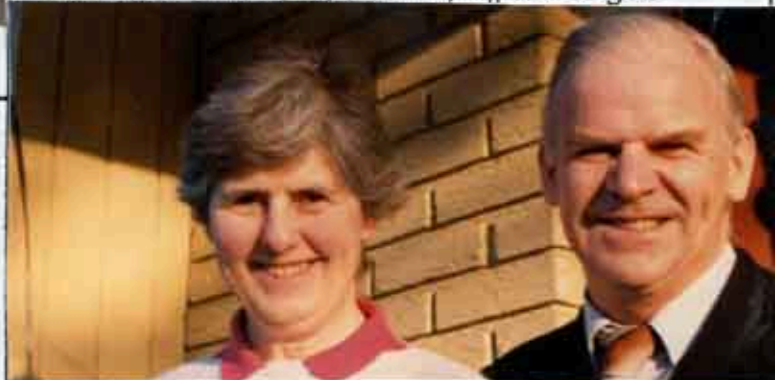
5th: Cousin Peter was married in Zambia. Pete was my first Godson - I took him around the world in 1973 (now that WAS an experience) and after he graduated from Durham he settled in Africa to teach the locals how to mine for copper - successfully. Everything I heard about his new wife, Noreen, through the Family Grapevine, was good - I looked forward to meeting her - one day.

6th: one of my greatest delights in this job, as I've written aforetime, is to be invited to the homes of choir families to enjoy a meal and thus to get to know them better. This day I was to the Hansens' - son John is a chorister in our MEG choir, Father Jack is in the Adult



choir and now Mother Karen has joined him - most happily. Waiting in the wings is small brother Rob, whose Turn Will Come.

7th: Keith and Ruth Bond arrived for a two-week visit. They are dear and very precious friends: Keith was sub-organist at Blackburn Cathedral during my tenancy of the organ



bench, and Ruth and I spent a happy day every week playing with the paperwork that went with the music department at the cathedral. One of her main tasks was to help me organize the annual Bishop's Awards for Blackburn Diocese - which had reached large proportions. It was a happy co-incidence that the day after they arrived they were able to attend the Awards' Service in Trinity Cathedral, Trenton when Bishop Belshaw presented his certificates and medallions to the USA's first recipients. That was a very good time - the Bishop and all who had shaken his episcopal hand during the impressive service were walking on air. It looks like becoming an annual event.



Life here is bizzee. The 20th was one such day:

- 8.30 Two choir practices and two services (as is usual for Sundays here)
- 12.30 Party for the Adult choir in a nearby Gracious Home.
- 2.30 Photo session and dress rehearsal for my Princeton Singers in a church some 10 miles away.



- 4.30 Princeton Singers' Concert. (Rather good).
- 6.30 Party for Princeton Singers in the home of a member. (Very good)
- 8.00 Recital by Philip Crozier (former Blackburn chorister and now a superb organist living in Montreal) - at Trinity. A virtuoso performance - he's fabulous!
- 9.15 Ice-cream session with Crozier and some organ devotees at Thomas Sweets' Shoppe. (A local Mecca for sinful food).
- 11.00 Bed. - Zonk!

26/27th. Took the MEG choir to York, Pennsylvania, for an overnight stay, to sing at two churches. 20 miles from York the bus engine blew up and we were stranded on the highway for five hours. Never mind - I thought a choir practice by the roadside would be a Good Thing; it was. The bus driver's mouth fell open when he heard us sing Palestrina, Byrd and other Gems from the Christian repertoire. The interesting thing is that although our visit went very well (we have a superb tape of our evening concert which I gave to a number of friends in England and Italy) the time that

The choir members enjoyed most was that choir



practice by the roadside as cars and trucks hurtled past us oblivious of the culture that was nigh.

### May

Summer is near - Oh, joy!

One of my confirmation choirboys came up to me and said, "You remember telling us how to pray at our last class?" 'Yes'. "Well, I tried it, and it works! I got an answer to my prayer - Wow!" (Wow, indeed - Hallelujah). His parents were equally thrilled - both told me of the prayer incident, and I was moved, as were they.

Another choirboy said, during a class, "Oh, Jesus died in our place!" When I told one of our staff about this she said, "Not many adults know that!"

Another choir parent wrote me a beautiful letter in which he said that our choir program was 'one of the cultural treasures of the State.' Wow, yet again - and thanx.

It was a great joy, at this season, to see two 'sets' of Princeton Singers being married in Trinity Church - both with Singers singing and much super music. All four are members of the Singers' Central Kommittee, and very dear friends.



## June

Summer is here - Hooray! The pressure of 16 hours of choir practices every week, plus meetings and everything else that goes into make up our bizzee shedule (pronounced in the English manner), ceases - brought to an end with a supa hamburger and swimming party in the spacious home of a choir family. Now is the season for recollection and forward planning, the season of participation in conferences around America, and the time for vacation.

But before that really started another welcome guest from England, whom I hadn't seen for nearly 30 years, blew in for a few nights.

Adrian Esdaile had been a founder member of the very first group of Singers I founded whilst still a student at Cambridge. His father had been my fist vicar, when I became a church organist. Adrian and I had kept in touch through Christmas cards - but that was about it. It was, therefore, a particular joy to welcome him to my home and to 'show him off' to some of my friends here. He is now Rector of Barnet Parish Church and was over here to lead a couple of retreats for the Episcopal Church. I recognised him immediately - and our friendship took up as though without a break. Wonderful.

9/10. Trinity staff enjoyed its annual 24-hour away time on the New Jersey seashore, where a generous parishioner, Louise Bristol, has a most lovely house, which can sleep us all with no trouble. This year we found that she had installed a swimming pool in the back garden complete with adjacent jacuzzi (heated whirl-pool). At one time all members of the staff were in the jacuzzi - this I didn't manage to record photographically (I was in there with the rest) but did manage to capture our first tentative steps towards total immersion

Unfortunately the Rector could not be with us - his wife, Ellie, who was dearly loved by all the parish, was seriously ill, and he was at her bedside. She died a few weeks afterwards -



Trinity Staff enjoying Louise Bristol's outdoor Jacuzzi, prior to total immersion.

and her funeral was the occasion for the out-pouring of a flood of love for Johnny, the Rector, & gratitude to God for sending us a saint whose fortitude during her long illness was an inspiration to us all.

11th The Vestry accepted the report of the '32ft committee' and I was authorised to order the work to be done; "We'll have the money by the end of this month - I know a number of generous parishioners who would like to support this venture", said our chairman.

20/21st. Spent a night with Ray and Lynn Elder at Teen Challenge headquarters in Pennsylvania. This was a remarkable experience, for at this center there are 250 youngish men who had reached the bottom of the ladder - drugs, crime, the lot, but who had since found the Living Christ in His resurrection power and whose lives had been turned round 180°. Typical of the lads I met there was one who had been thrown out of the US Navy for unspeakable reasons - but who, now, was set on his course to become ordained and to return to the Navy as a Chaplain! That was a most refreshing time for me - and the Elders' hospitality, as ever, was lavish and loving.





Breakfast In the wood with Ray Elder at Teen Challenge, Pennsylvania.

July

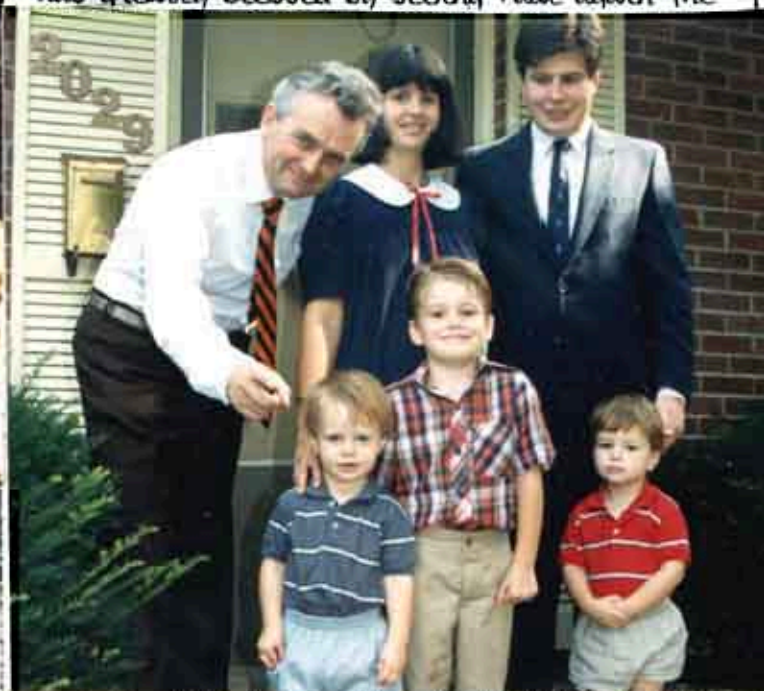
Summer is hotting up in every way - temperatures here can reach the high nineties - with humidity added, making the energy level sink below zero. It is good, therefore, to get away.

To get away to conferences: I went to three in a row:

First to Atlanta, Jawjah, for the Association of Anglican Musicians Conference - a time of rich fellowship with fellow Episcopal musicians and much learning through lectures, seminars and well-thought-through services. Also for good food. The most memorable 15 minutes of that week were spent eating the most blissful chocolate cake I have ever tasted - in company with the revered Alec Wyton (former organist of New York Cathedral and a predecessor of mine at St. Matthew's Church, Northampton, who was largely responsible for my coming to Trinity Church).

Then there was a free weekend before the American Guild of Organists' Conference in Detroit. Surprise, surprise, exactly halfway between Atlanta and Detroit is Lexington, Kentucky, where lives yet another former Blackburn chorister whom I haven't seen for 15 years, Paul Walmsley. Paul is the

anesthetist at Lexington Hospital, married with 3½ children and very attached to his church. A visit was much in order, and I was greatly blessed by seeing Paul again (he



With the Walmsley Family, Lexington Kentucky: Lee Ann, Dr. Paul, and David, John & Stephen.

hasn't changed at all) with his lovely family, and going with them to their little church which plays such an important part in their lives.

The AGO Conference in Detroit was as spectacular as it was (for me) short. It was held at the Renaissance Center Hotel on the waterfront between the USA and Canada - this amazing group of glass towers has been called one of the world's greatest modern buildings. I stayed in a more modest hotel a few blocks away - but which had a super view of the towers.

Three ever to be remembered experiences stand out for me:

(i) Going to the Renaissance Center on my first evening there just to look around - and to be hailed by "Hallo, John; come and join us". It was the voice of Joan Haggard, the Queen Bee of the conference (chairman of the planning committee) who was responsible for the whole show. That was a GOOD start to the Conference!



(ii) Being taken out to lunch (very large, very delicious) by Lionel Dakers, Director of the RSCM, who was in very good form after having delivered himself of a super lecture



Lionel Dakers and the Renaissance Center, Detroit

to the AGO delegates. I ate his generous hospitality without tinge of conscience, having taken off 16 lbs during the last couple of months.

(iii) Attending the world premiere, with the other 1,999 delegates, of a mammoth new work for the organ by Olivier Messaien. This was memorable (a) because it was incredibly hot, clothes were being shed right, left and center throughout the 2½ hour performance, (b) because very few of us seemed to understand fully what it was Messaien was trying to say - and that's heavy when you're sitting for 2½ hours! (c) because it was played superbly by Abnut Roessler, a German organist who plays all Messaien's organ works - even tho' the organ ciphered twice, and (d) because the



composer was present - following the work from his own score throughout. He received

a standing ovation at the very end, when he took a number of calls from the enthusiastic members who stayed for the whole performance.

The next morning, before dawn had even thought of cracking, I flew to Florida to direct the RSCM course for girls which had started the previous day. That was SUPER. I've never directed an all-girls' course before and I found it a Good Experience - relaxing and inspiring - with super staff led by Murray and Hazel Somerville who had prepared my way before me so that all I had to do was to sit behind the wheel of an already happily moving course. At the end Hazel said that it had



been the best course she'd ever attended - and I felt the same way. It was made doubly happy because two of my girls from Trinity were taking part - and both 'did me proud'.

### August

Well, now then, I don't really know how I can tackle the last part of this Newsletter, for I experienced a vacation the like of which I have never known, seasoned though I am to visiting friends and relations in various parts of the world.

There were two distinct parts - part one and part two (I want to make this very clear!) The first part was spent in England, head-quartering myself with cousin Sheila and Dick



in Reigate and then driving up to Blackburn and back via Wales and the south coast with cousin Doug (who has experienced JB vacations before, as regular subscribers to this Letter will know!)

On my second night at Reigate I took Sheila and Dick out to dinner to a nearby hotel restaurant. Halfway through our meal two ladies, who had been eating at an adjacent table, got up to leave the dining room. As they passed us one looked at us and said, "Hello, John, what are you doing here?" It was Irene Kane, a former member of Trinity's Adult choir who lives around the corner from me in Lawrenceville and who helped me move into my house there nearly 4 years ago. "I'm having dinner with my cousin," said I. "I've just had dinner with my cousin," said she!

The vacation had got off to a good start! It continued well when I was entertained to lunch at the HQ of the RSCM by the secretary, Vincent Waterhouse (see last October) complete with guests Lionel Dakers (director - see July/Detroit) and Martin Haw (senior commissioner - see March/Bishop's Awards). A "Wow" is in order, I think.

Driving around the Yeukay with Doug, staying with friends and relations, was a very precious and beautiful experience. Let me share only four:

(i) Our second night in Blackburn was spent in the home of Paul, Pam and Nigel Hargreaves. (Nigel is yet another old chorister of the cathedral, albeit a young old'n). The Hargreaves threw a party for me - inviting 30 old friends to a festive reunion; they wouldn't tell me who was coming - a potentially threatening situation, but I did know everyone AND remembered all their names as they came through the door - until the very last couple! The lady came through first - I panicked - who is she? I was sure I hadn't met her before! She was followed a long split second later by her husband, whom I knew very well indeed - he is my Bank Manager! That was a



Noreen and John (Bank Manager) Oakley with hosts Paul and Pam Hargreaves in their Mellor home.

good evening. I began to wilt at 11.00 p.m. and it shaved. One of my friends, who knew me well, said "Why don't you go to bed" - so I did, and the party just carried on!

(ii) In North Wales we stayed with my cousin Robert Bertalot and his family. (His wife,



Jackdaw Bertalot, Jonathan, Caroline, Robert and David Bertalot outside their Welsh home.

Caroline, you may remember, visited me in Lawrenceville last year). The Robert Bs live in an enormous house miles from anywhere in wild and woolly Wales - and we had a great time with them climbing a Welsh mountain, talking about the Bertalot family and getting to know one another - for I'd seen Robert only a couple of times - once, for a brief hour, some 6 years ago, when he visited Mum and me in Blackburn just before Mum died, and for



a short visit by his parents when he was 12 and I was a student. I was moved to see him a 'grown man' for he looked so like my father (his uncle) - it was uncanny.



(iii) Staying with another former choirboy of mine, this time from Northampton days, Robert Walker, to whom I had taught the organ and 'harmony'. It was a particular thrill to stay with him (a) because he hadn't changed at all in 20 years, (b) he was living in the cottage where Elgar had composed his cello concerto, and (c) Robert himself is a composer - his latest work being a symphony which will be premiered by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra under Andre Previn next year!

(iv) We also had lunch with yet another former Northampton chorister, Jimmy Percival, who lives with his family in Worthing, Sussex. He, again, I hadn't seen for 20 years or more. Both he and I were thrilled to see each other again - we exchanged so much news of what we had done during the intervening years. He was sorry that his son, Chris, wasn't there, but he was in Bruges with his school choir. Perhaps something could be done to rectify this? Read on.

Part Two of the vacation was spent in Italy - and here my typing fingers begin to fail - for there is NO WAY I can even begin to describe what that visit meant to me.

After four fabulous days in exquisite Venice cousin Doug & I entrained for Milan where we were met by Don & Elizabeth Fox. (Donald, you will remember, was responsible for finding cousin Renzo for me 18 months previously).

We enjoyed the most amazing 6 hours in that city - walking in and on Milan Cathedral - the view from the top of the top (the flying buttresses each craned with a towering and

most delicate pinnacle) was breathtaking; the whole structure had been thoroughly restored - shining white marble everywhere, and so clean that you could, as they say, eat your lunch on it.

After seeing that we took a bus to the other end of the city to see "The Last Supper" (The Last Supper!) It was in the midst of being restored and I didn't know what to make of it - for it was in such a decrepit state - but it was one of the most famous paintings of all time, and it certainly said something to me, tho' I wot not what.

Doug and I then spent three days with Don and Elizabeth in their Pastor's Flat in Turin.



(Don is Pastor of the English-speaking Waldensian church in that city). One of the many highlights of that time was to visit the cathedral where The Shroud (of Turin) is kept. We stood within a couple of yards of the shroud (which is kept in a silver casket over a special altar), and I waited for something to 'happen' to me. Nothing did. Why? Here we were with one of the most sacred relics of the Christian Church - why no holy vibration? Luke tells us in his gospel: "He is not here, He is risen and goes before you!" Hallelujah.

The most moving time of those three days was to go with our hosts to the annual Waldensian gathering held on an alpine slope - so high



that the clouds were constantly covering us. This was a 'mountain-top' experience, for we were with some 2000 Waldensians (the Waldensian church grew from a 13th century Christian, Valdo, who was one of the first to protest against some of the practices of the RC church - in this he preceded Luther by several hundred years. His followers have a history, rather like the Jews, of being persecuted, often to the point of shedding their blood for their faith, and they have grown into a tightly knit 'family' of Christians whose lives are spent in the mountainous region of the NW of Italy. It was from these folk that the Bertalots sprang. So to be with my kinsfolk whilst they celebrated their faith quietly through sermons, hymn singing and other addresses on that flowered-stream field (it was just like The Sound of Music) was amazing. It was even more amazing when, towards the end of the day a couple came over to me and said "We are your cousins Augusta and Raffaele, with whom you are going to stay tomorrow. We recognised you from your photograph in your last-year's Newsletter!" (They said this in Italian - Donald had to translate - but what a joyous moment for us all!)

And so, the next day D & E drove D and J to stay with cousin Augusta. And there to meet us were two of Renzo's (grown up) children, Elizabetta (who speaks excellent English) and Giovanni ('nearly-a-doctor') - Giovanni is, of course, Italian for "John". What an experience to meet another "John Bertalot"!

But more amazing still was to be handed, shortly after we arrived, the photograph which Renzo mentioned in his original letter: the photograph of my grandparents and their children when young, including my father, aged 15 and Robert's (N.Wales) father, his brother, aged 6. Augusta's summer house, where we were staying, was the house where Renzo was brought up. When I held that photograph in my hands I nearly melted with emotion. Dear Renzo gave me a copy of it when I stayed with him a few days later in Rome. What a precious gift!



Elizabetta Bertalot, JB, Cousin Augusta and Giovanni (John) Bertalot, holding the photo of JB's Grandparents' family. (JB's Dad= 2nd from R)

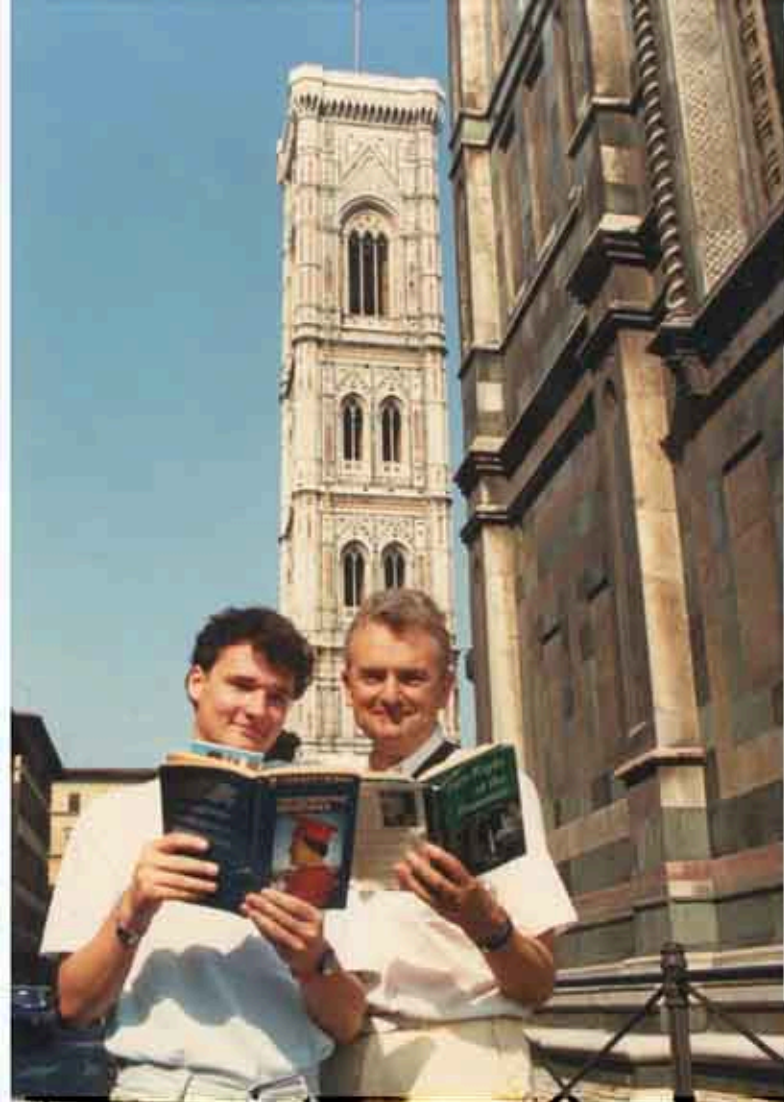
The next day I saw the house where my grandfather was born - next to the Waldensian church in that picturesque village of San Germano Chisone, which nestles in such beautiful mountainous country. I was shown church registers going back several centuries wherein are inscribed the marriages of many a Bertalot, and I learned so much about the Waldensian Church and its brave people who have stood firm in their evangelical faith for so many centuries. I was so proud to be one of them, and to be loved by my new-found cousins so wholly.

Could anything follow such a precious few days? Yes! Three idyllic days in Florence, soaking up sunshine and culture in equal measure and meeting two of Doug's school friends who were camping there.

And thus to Rome to stay with cousin Renzo, his wife Livia, and two grown-up children, Giovanni and Elizabetta, Giovanni's fiancée, Lucia, and to meet the families of Renzo's married children, Waldo and Luciano. I was in heaven for 5 days.

Our first stop was, of course, St. Peter's; I had always, like almost everyone else, wanted to visit St. Peter's, but never, in my wildest





Cousin Doug & JB enjoying the cultural sights of Florence: The Giotto Tower and Duomo.



3 Bertalots: Renzo, his son 'John' & John

*imaginings, would I have thought of seeing it first in company with Italian Bertalot cousins, one of whom is called 'John'.*

*"John", with his fiance Lucia, also took us on a tour of ancient Rome, including a visit to the prison where St. Paul was kept and from where he wrote a number of his epistles. This really was getting back to the origins of the Christian faith.*

*But the greatest blessing of those 5 packed days was to enjoy three parties with Renzo's greater family (two of his sons are married and live in Rome). Can you visualize what it felt like to visit the homes of Waldo and of Luciano and see nothing but 'wall-to-wall' Bertalots? (no one came to every party and I was made to feel such a part of the family (even though communication was not easy - I had no Italian and my hosts had not too much English, save for Renzo & Elizabetta.)).*



Livia and Renzo Bertalot in Renzo's supanoo office of the Italian Bible Society in Rome.





**WALL-TO-WALL BERTALOTS** at Luciano & Karin's Apartment: (L-R) Luciano, Renzo & Livia, Karin, Ysobel, Elizabetta, Giovanni, Lucia, JB, Doug, Mara & Valdo. (Centre) Thlerry. (Front) Thomas, Luca and Yvonne.



Cousin Luca Bertalot (p.4) to whom I had given a New York T-shirt at the first all-Bertalot party, had taken the trouble to learn some American for our next party the following night: He came up to me and said. "Hi, John!" "Hi, Luca!" said I. I really felt we had communicated.

For our last evening in Rome the Bertalot clan enjoyed a suppa pizza party in a restaurant exactly opposite the Colosseum - followed by a tour of floodlit Rome which culminated by my running down AND running up the Spanish steps with cousin ("Hi!") Luca. *Watta wayta enda visita Roma!*

I hold in my heart the hearts of all my Italian cousins, for they shared so richly with me their love, their homes and their most beautiful country. But above all they shared themselves. *Laus Deo! Grazie, caro cugini!*

And so back to England, where cousin Sheila and Dick had staying with them their son, Peter and his 4-month bride, Noreen (see April) who had flown from Zambia to attend Pete's twin-brother's wedding the previous week (Nick and Helen) - so it was All Happening. In addition, the day Doug and I arrived in Reigate, Dick was celebrating his official retirement - so a toast in champagne was solemnly drunk.

The vacation ended with Doug and self attending a Promenade Concert in the Royal Albert Hall with cousin Joan and Llewellyn - English culture at its communicative best - in company with very dear relations. My cup ran over. 15



Toasting Dick's retirement: Maternal cousins - Doug, Sheila, Dick, Noreen & Peter, JB.

Dick and Sheila saw me off from Gatwick on Sept 1st - and so did the entire Percival family from Worthing (see early August) -





Farewell at Gatwick: JB, Jimmy Percival, Dick & Sheila, with Jimmy's children: Chris & Heidi.

Chris had returned from his successful choir tour of Belgium and his Mum'n'Dad'n'sister had driven all the way so that Chris and I could meet. I really appreciated that.

### The Fall

(no, not the story of Adamneve...)

Life on the West side of the Atlantic began well, not least because I returned greatly enriched by all I had experienced during the vacation:

The choirs are flourishing as never before - at the last count I had 70 boys and girls (from 8 to 17 years of age) and 66 adults in our three choirs, including 17 new girls, one of whom is Irene Kane's daughter (see early August).

The 32ft electronic pedal stops were added - and they are MAGNIFIQUE - I am thrilled to the roots of my musical being by the glory they add to our superb organ - not only are they good but they get louder the more stops you pull out!

(By the way, I started to write this Newsletter in September - life has been so incredibly busy this Fall that I am finishing it at the end of November! So let me add what has been happening since September:)

John Kemp (architect, builder and Evangelist extraordinary - see Feb, St. Matthew Passion) told me in September that my front roof would leak this winter if I didn't have it replaced; he replaced it. I asked him if he could paint the outside of the house whilst he was at it - he did. Then I asked him if he would care to look at my two bathrooms, which have been dis-

aster areas ever since I moved in here 4 years ago. He drew up a total dream plan which incorporated everything I had ever hoped my bathrooms could have - and three days ago, after 3½ weeks' solid work he has presented me with two Hilton-Plus bathrooms, complete with reflecting mirrors ("you can see as far as Trenton one way and Princeton the other") and my very own jacuzzi. Whatta luxury to wallow in my hot tub each night being massaged all over by strong jets of water! I also have the shower on at the same time - it's like being in an Elysian Niagara.

Two weeks ago former Blackburn Cathedral chorister John Marr came to stay - we had a joyful time 'doing' the sights of New York, but he saw The Bathrooms when they were still only wood and mess.

A sad note is that associate Irene Willis has got another church post - I, and all of us will miss her beyond measure - but we have a new assistant choirmaster and assistant organist plus an excellent organ scholar who is as attractive as she is talented - so that department goes well -

The rector has returned to Trinity full of new ideas and energy, assisted by a new priest who is reputed to have the best singing voice of any cleric in the diocese AND a bachelor of music degree (amongst several others in theology) -

and Donald Kruger has just been awarded a choral scholarship to Trinity College, Cambridge - beginning in 12 months' time - so we have most happily come full cycle.

Dear friends and relations - thank you for enjoying this Newsletter - an increasing number of you say, when I bring out my camera to record a Happening, "Will that appear in the next Christmas Newsletter?" Well I always hope it will - and it really is a hard job having to leave out 90% of the photos which I want to include - but if I don't draw a line right now, dear friends, you won't get this Newsletter until Easter!

Happy Christmas  
from John Bertalot