

# NORWICH CATHEDRAL EX-CHORISTERS' GUILD

(Founded 1884)



## NEWSLETTER Spring 2023

As we approach Holy Week, it feels strange to be writing about last Christmas! The weeks race past in the busy life of the cathedral and before we know it, one liturgical season has finished and we are onto the next.

It has been an uplifting time in the life of the cathedral choirs, not least because Christmas 2022 was the first 'normal' Christmas since before the pandemic. It was joyous to welcome such large audiences and congregations to our Christmas services and concerts. Advent began with a wonderful Procession for Advent Sunday followed by a thoroughly enjoyable reception, generously hosted by the Ex-Choristers' Guild: this gathering after the service has become a well-loved part of Advent Sunday at the Cathedral and we continue to be grateful to the Guild for laying it on.

The Cathedral Choir travelled to London in December to give a Christmas concert at St Stephen, Walbrook in the City, in aid of SUCCESS charity, which supports children living with brain tumours (some of you will know that I have a personal connection to this important cause, via my daughter, Emily). The choir was tremendously well received by the large and appreciative audience: other highlights for the choristers included changing at Mansion House next door and of course a trip to McDonald's!

For the first time that we are aware of, the cathedral choir gave a performance of Handel's *Messiah*, accompanied by Norwich Baroque, alongside a cast of distinguished soloists. The boys' and girls' singing was truly inspiring: committed, energetic and expressive. I was incredibly proud of them all. For every single chorister on the stage, it was their first experience of singing *Messiah* – something that will stay with them for the rest of their lives. It continues to be a great joy and privilege for me to be able to share such wonderful music with them, as they come to it with such freshness and enthusiasm!

Only a week later, the choir gave their annual Christmas concert, accompanied by brass ensemble with Lay Clerk Colin Shaw on percussion. This ever-popular evening was rather different in feel to *Messiah* – Santa hats included – and the choir gave a polished performance of beautiful carols alongside some secular Christmas favourites in the second half.

2023 began with beautiful Epiphany music: the boys and girls singing Britten's *Ceremony of Carols* with harp accompaniment, the cathedral chamber choir performing a Sequence of Epiphany music with readings, and the cathedral choir singing an uplifting Epiphany Procession, moving throughout the building in the traditional fashion.

The end of January was marked by the Installation of Dean Andrew Braddock, with a wonderfully uplifting service (see below). Dean Andrew has already been tremendously supportive of the contribution that the choir makes to the life and worship of the cathedral and

we are looking forward to the years ahead under his leadership.

This year's Holy Week begins with a special performance by the cathedral choir of Bach's *St Matthew Passion*. We were due to have performed this incredible work – regarded as one of the great masterpieces of Western music – in April 2020, but the performance was cancelled due to the outbreak of Covid-19. A new group of choristers has now learnt the work, approaching it with inspiring freshness, enthusiasm and commitment. The choir will be accompanied by Norwich Baroque and joined by a cast of highly acclaimed soloists for what promises to be a very memorable concert.

Throughout Holy Week we put on musical 'reflections', to follow the evening Eucharists and Addresses: this year, we welcome back former Assistant Organist George Inscoe to Victoria's *Tenebrae responsories* with his Norwich Consort of Voices. The girl choristers sing Pergolesi's *Stabat Mater* on Tuesday, and the Cathedral Chamber Choir sing Howells' *Requiem* on Wednesday. Admission is free and all are welcome to attend.

There is much to look forward to in the rest of the year, not least the re-opening of the cathedral organ after its complete rebuilding by Harrison & Harrison of Durham. The inaugural recital will be given by internationally renowned concert organist Thomas Trotter on Saturday 25 November with a whole year of other events planned to celebrate the organ's return. In October, the cathedral choir will be joined by the Royal Philharmonic Concert Orchestra to perform a 'Royal Celebration' featuring music by composer Patrick Hawes alongside works by Handel, Mozart, Elgar and Parry, in aid of the East Anglian Air Ambulance and Norwich Cathedral Trust.

All of these exciting projects are now an expected part of the musical life of the cathedral – but they cost money. The Statham Society was created in February 2021, as a way to enable people to support the cathedral on an ongoing basis, giving monthly as a Gold, Silver or Bronze member. With HRH The Duke of Edinburgh (formerly the Earl of Wessex) as its Patron, the Statham Society has already raised over £50,000, with a regular annual income of over £7,000. This ensures that we will continue to be able to present exciting opportunities for our choristers and put on a varied programme of high quality music for the people of Norwich to enjoy. If you haven't already joined, I would urge you to do so (for as little as £10 per month): you can find details on the cathedral website at [www.cathedral.org.uk/worship/music/support-our-music/](http://www.cathedral.org.uk/worship/music/support-our-music/)

We look forward very much to welcoming Ex-Choristers to join us for the final weekend of the choir term in July if not before. Thank you for your continued support!

Ashley Grote, Master of Music.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### 2023 Guild Reunion - SAVE THE DATE!

This year's Guild reunion will be on the weekend of **9/10th July 2022**. We would love to catch up with as many ex-choristers as possible over **dinner on Saturday** evening (venue tbc) and then at worship, lunch, outdoor games and the Valedictions in the afternoon on Sunday. It was a glorious family friendly weekend last year, so why not use this as an excuse to get together with old friends or visit family in Norfolk this year!?



### A new Dean for Norwich

We gathered in the Cathedral in January to welcome Dr Andrew Braddock and his family, as he took up the role of Dean. The choir sounded fantastic singing music by Vaughan Williams, Bruckner, Sarah Quartel, Dove and Duruflé. The Dean will automatically become our new President and we look forward to getting to know him over the coming months.

### Advent Reunion

Once again, we got together for an fantastic atmospheric Advent procession in the Cathedral following the AGM. It was wonderful to host the choristers and their families for the drinks party that is now a firm fixture in the calendar. After drinks, the Choir treated us to a sneak preview of some Christmas music.

In 2023 Advent Sunday is **Sunday 3rd December** - get it in the diary now!



### Flipping good fun!

Lots of fun was had on Shrove Tuesday with pancake races for the Girls, Boys, Parents, Staff and Clergy. Thanks go to Mr Curtis for organising and the Norwich school catering team for providing pancakes and refreshments.



### Congratulations Alice!

For the second time, Alice Platten was seen flying the flag for Norwich on BBC One as a competitor in the BBC Young Chorister competition. We were very proud that this year, Alice made it to the final and gave a wonderful performance of the Star Carol by John Rutter.



*Photos: Esther Platten Bill Smith and BBC*

## Meet the new Assistant Organist - Robbie Carroll

Former Assistant Director of Music at St Fin Barre's Cathedral in Cork, Robbie joined the Norwich Community in October 2022.



### When did you first start playing the Organ?

At the age of fourteen - once I was tall enough to reach the pedals (just about!)

### What would you be if you weren't an organist?!

I probably wouldn't have known what to do with my life - so I guess it's good that I'm an organist!

### Are you working on any big pieces at the moment - is there anything we can look forward to when the 'Big' organ returns?

I play a transcription of 'the Planets' by Holst, which is a fun one for any film music fans. Other than that, I'm working on Franck's second choral (which I'll give an outing to at some point during Lent).

### Have you been able to explore Norfolk at all? Any favourite places so far?

I haven't had much time to get out of Norwich yet, but I plan to! My only experience of exploring Norfolk so far has been on my 'maiden voyage' here (taking the Dublin-Holyhead ferry, and driving a very full car across the UK). It was slightly too chaotic a journey to really take anything in - but I look forward to getting out and about a bit. I was delighted to discover there is a California here!

### Have you learnt any Norfolk phrases or words yet bore?

Considering that I'm new to the UK, I sometimes have trouble telling whether something is a 'Norfolk phrase' or a 'UK phrase' - so the short answer is, I'm not sure! While exploring Norwich for the first time (on my audition day, in July) I had two separate incidences of someone finding it difficult to understand my (Irish) accent - which I found very entertaining.

### (One from the Choristers) Favourite biscuit?

A very fine question - nothing beats a McVities's chocolate caramel digestive!

## Ex-Chorister Profile: Camilla King (nee Stagg) 1996-1998

**Tell us briefly where you are, and what you are up to now...** I'm currently living in the Cotswolds and working as Executive Producer / CEO of the Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod (bit of a mouthful) in North Wales.

**...and remind us what years you were in the choir and who was your Director.** I joined in 1996 and was lucky enough to have both Neil Taylor and Katherine Dienes as my Directors.

### Is there a 'stand-out' memory that you have from your time in the choir?

There are honestly so many, but the carol services were always a highlight, singing Britten *Ceremony of Carols* in the Castle Museum, possibly the hottest tour ever experienced to Germany, and perhaps the biggest one for me was overcoming my nerves and starting to sing solos - we did a performance of Pergolesi *Stabat Mater* and nailing my solo movement was an incredible experience.

### Were there any particular influences from your time in the choir that led you to your career?

I saw lots of choristers going on to study music at university, and their advice about different courses, whether to try the conservatoire route and so on was really useful. I was discouraged from studying music by teachers, with the view that it would be better to go into something more traditional like Law! Others showed me that 'music' was a viable career, and that it was ok to study and work in the field I felt most passionate about.



**What skills learnt at Norwich Cathedral have helped you later in life?** The importance of teamwork, mentoring, and pursuing the things you love - even now singing is one of the things that makes me happiest, and I owe that to the Girls' Choir. The knowledge I gained around vocal technique and production has also proved invaluable, as I spent a period of time as Casting Manager for English National Opera, and also developed a choral education scheme, Gabrieli Roar, for the Gabrieli Consort and Players. I doubt I'd have secured either of those roles without my time in the choir as a building block in my understanding of singing.

**What would you now tell your Chorister-self?** You'll always be the weird classical music geek, but you'll turn that into a life dedicated to creating opportunities for performers, and demonstrating the benefits music can bring to all sorts of communities. On balance, things work out ok!

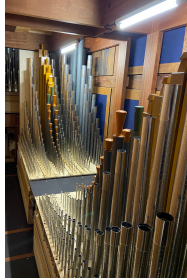
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**What piece of music springs to mind when you think of Norwich?** There are two, The first is John Rutter Gaelic Blessing - pure cheese, but it's one of the first pieces I sang with the choir, at an evensong, and it's just one of those works that sits beautifully for altos, and is a joy to sing. The second is The Way You Look Tonight - our party piece, which always came out in concerts, gorgeous harmonies, we all knew it by heart and I have many happy memories of performing it.

**What is your most listened to track at the moment/CD on your playlist at the moment?** It'll be something by an obscure Welsh indie artist, for work, or most likely a tune from Hamilton or Dear Evan Hansen, because my kids are obsessed with musicals at the moment and they dictate the car music!

## Loud Organs His Glory! - An update

The organ installation has been progressing at a feverish rate since the start of January. The team from Harrison & Harrison have been working long hours and are nearing the end of the installation phase. Much of the time has been taken up in building the new frame inside the organ to accommodate the restructuring inside the case and then constructing the new windchests and swell boxes. The beautifully refurbished console has been returned and is awaiting its new stop knobs. The winding system has been overhauled and as I write the thousands of pipes are being returned and most should be in place by 24<sup>th</sup> March. The case pipes have been gilded and their splendour will be revealed when the scaffolding is dismantled at the end of the month. Once all is in place the detailed process of voicing and tuning will begin – hopefully finishing by the end of June.



We are hugely grateful to the Durham team for working so tirelessly and it has been great to have them with us at the cathedral.

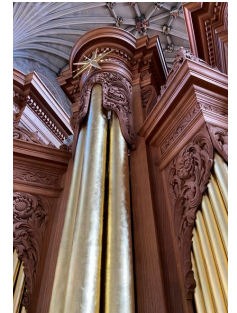
We will start using the organ as soon as the voicing is finished and the opening recital will be given by Thomas Trotter on Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> November – ticket details will be available in due course.

The organ will be dedicated at the Eucharist for Christ the King on Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> November and we are planning an organ festival in the second week of **July 2024** – this will include the choirs, recitals and live BBC broadcasts.

Thanks for all your support and interest throughout this exciting project!

David Dunnett.

*Photos; Harrison & Harrison.*



## Ex-Choristers! Where are you now?

Please do send a photograph together with a short biography (up to 100 words) of what you have done since leaving the choir to David Clover [david.clover@quadra-foil.com](mailto:david.clover@quadra-foil.com) and visit [www.norwichcathedralexchoristersguild.org.uk](http://www.norwichcathedralexchoristersguild.org.uk) if you would like to see examples of what others have written.

If you would also like to be interviewed for a more detailed feature in the newsletter please do contact [estherplatten@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:estherplatten@yahoo.co.uk).

## 2023 Norwich Cathedral ex-Choristers' Guild Committee

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Vice Chair - Tim Ashcroft

Secretary - Esther Platten

Treasurer - Jon Burrell

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**Contact us:** Website: [www.norwichcathedralexchoristersguild.org.uk](http://www.norwichcathedralexchoristersguild.org.uk)

Or Cathedral.org.uk and visit NCexCG entry via "music"

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**The Newsletter Editor:** Vacant. % Esther Platten (as above)

