



Copy of Biennial Choir Photo, credit Marie Davey

Something Special

There are few things more joyful than the Cathedral filled with people celebrating. This term brought four such occasions, and our musicians rose to meet each with grace and skill.

On 11 May, we marked the 80th Anniversary of VE Day with a civic service attended by dignitaries and veterans from across Surrey. The music struck a balance between reflection and thanksgiving, and the service was followed by a celebration on the green, complete with tea, cake, a military band, and vintage vehicles.

Soon after, we welcomed cadets, veterans and families for the annual Surrey Joint Services Charities celebration. The choir sang at the morning Eucharist and then stayed for the following celebration, singing

Parry's deeply moving *'There is an old belief'*.

The next weekend, the Nave was once again filled for the Ordination of Priests and Deacons, always a highlight in the Cathedral calendar. The music added depth to the moment as families gathered to witness this special milestone.

This month saw the return of the Biennial Choir Photo. With impressive coordination from Katherine and some excellent crowd-herding skills, they managed to gather (almost) everyone, from choristers to Lay Clerks, clergy to organists, on the Chancel steps. After a few shouts of "Steeeeeeve!" from the choristers to round up the last person, and some final adjustments, the photo was captured: a wonderful memento of our musical family at this moment in time.

Farewell!

On Sunday 6 July, the Choral Evensong marked the end of the academic year, and with it a moment of heartfelt goodbyes and hopeful beginnings. Six new choristers were installed, and we said farewell to eleven who are heading into new chapters of their lives. Among them were three members of our Changed Voices, two Lay Clerks, and our outgoing Organ Scholar. These transitions are always emotional, filled with memories of years spent together in rehearsal rooms, choir stalls, services and concerts.

It was especially fitting that the service concluded with William Walton's monumental work 'The Twelve'. Rarely performed due to its scale and complexity, it proved a powerful and fitting close to the year. Lay Clerk Ollie Turner has written about the piece and the story behind it and you can find that below.

To those moving on: thank you. You have left your mark, and you carry our gratitude with you.

A Colossal Collaboration: *The Twelve*

William Walton's 'The Twelve' is perhaps the most monumentally ambitious piece we perform at Guildford Cathedral. At over eleven minutes long, it is a dramatic, demanding and deeply moving work, featuring a soaring soprano duet, solo lines for tenor, alto and bass, a quasi-fugal section, and a devilishly difficult organ part.

Its text, written by the celebrated poet W. H. Auden, is no less powerful - visceral, complex and musically rich. What makes 'The Twelve' particularly striking is that both music and text were commissioned together by the then Dean of Christ Church, Oxford, John Lowe. Walton and Auden, two of Christ Church's most distinguished alumni, were brought together for a rare collaboration that, despite a rocky start, produced something truly extraordinary.

Walton reportedly struggled with Auden's libretto, calling it "obscure and difficult to set." However, he was no stranger to wrestling with text, and in this case, the creative tension between composer and poet gave rise to one of Walton's most distinctive choral works; a piece that moves through conflict, prayer, and reflection, ending in triumphant thanksgiving.

Auden's poetry is split into three sections. the first describes the apostles' courageous ministry after Pentecost, their proclamation of the Gospel, and the brutal persecutions they faced. The second is a personal prayer, a moment of stillness centred on a haunting soprano duet:

O Lord, my God, though I forsake thee, forsake me not...

The final section reflects on what the twelve disciples mean to us today, culminating in a joyful outpouring of praise for the legacy:

Twelve as the winds and the months are those who taught us these things... let us praise them all with a merry noise.

Musically, 'The Twelve' showcases many of Walton's characteristic hallmarks: angular rhythms, rich harmonies, and thrilling vocal writing. It is fiendishly difficult for choir and organist alike, and seldom attempted in regular church programming due to its scale and complexity. But when all the musical forces come together, it is an unforgettable experience, both to perform and to hear.

A Daring Descent

On 14 June, 26 brave souls took on the Cathedral Tower for our charity abseil, raising funds for the future of music and heritage at Guildford Cathedral. We are thrilled to report that over £12,000 was raised in total!

Team Music was particularly well represented, with Lay Clerks Fraser Ellson and Ollie Turner, Organ Scholar George Baldwin, Liturgy and Music Administrator Carolyn Howard-Jones, and their good friend Louise Gerth all descending the tower in the name of musical excellence (and perhaps a little adrenaline). Huge thanks to everyone who supported, donated or cheered from the ground, it made all the difference.



Choir Tour

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After a five-year hiatus, the Guildford Cathedral Choir embarked on a much-anticipated international tour this July, setting off for a week of music, culture and fellowship in Denmark. With concerts in historic venues, plenty of sightseeing, and even a visit to LEGOLAND, the tour brought together choristers, chaperones, and lay clerks for an unforgettable summer adventure. Ollie Turner provided us with write ups of each day, summarised below:

Day One - Touchdown in Denmark

The excitement was tangible as the choir gathered at Gatwick Airport, shepherded with good humour and efficiency by our ever-reliable chaperones and led by Organist and Master of the Choristers, Mrs Katherine Dienes-Williams, and Sub Organist, Mr Asher Oliver. A smooth journey ensued and soon the group touched down in Denmark.

A slightly over-complicated border crossing (note to self: never mention travelling with children unless you have *all* the paperwork) was followed by a coach ride to Viborg. With the Lay Clerks engaged in a heated quiz about capitial cities and choristers singing along to coach karaoke, spirits were high. After more than 300 miles of travel, everyone was grateful to arrive at the hostel for a hot meal and some well-earned rest.



Day Two- Rainstorms, Rehearsals, and a Rapturous Reception

Day Two began bright and early, with some brave souls (including Asher and a few Lay Clerks) taking a 7am swim before breakfast. The day's first adventure involved dodging a spectacular Danish thunderstorm en route to Viborg Cathedral - some more successfully than others!

Once inside, the choristers enjoyed a cultural walking tour of Viborg before rehearsals began. A last-minute logistical shuffle (with the organ inconveniently located at the opposite end of the Cathedral) was handled with typical good humour and flexibility. The concert was a triumph: Howells' *'Take Him, Earth, for Cherishing'* moved some to tears, Harris' *'Faire is the Heaven'* soared through the vaulted space, and Iain Farrington's *'Nova!'* brought the audience to their feet.

Afterwards, it was back to the hostel for another delicious Danish supper, some free time, and an early night, ready for the adventures of the next day.

Day Three - A Day Off in LEGOLAND

Wednesday was all about fun. Choristers and Lay Clerks alike (and a few other very excited adults) embraced their inner child with a full day at LEGOLAND Billund. The day was filled with laughter, photos, theme park snacks, and a surprising level of competitive spirit on the rides. A well-deserved break and a highlight for many.

Day Four - Journey to Copenhagen

Refreshed and recharged, the choir set off for the capital city, travelling across the Danish landscape to Copenhagen. Upon arrival, there was time to explore the city centre on foot and from water, with a canal boat trip offering a different view of the city's beauty and history.

Day Five - Final Concert in the Heart of Copenhagen

The last full day of the tour was spent soaking up the sights and sounds of Copenhagen, including visits to key landmarks and some free time to explore in small groups. That evening, the choir sang their final concert of the tour at Trinitatis Kirke, a joyful conclusion to a week filled with music, growth, and memories made. Afterwards, the group gathered for a celebratory meal, reflecting on a week well spent.

Day Six - Home Again, Hearts Full

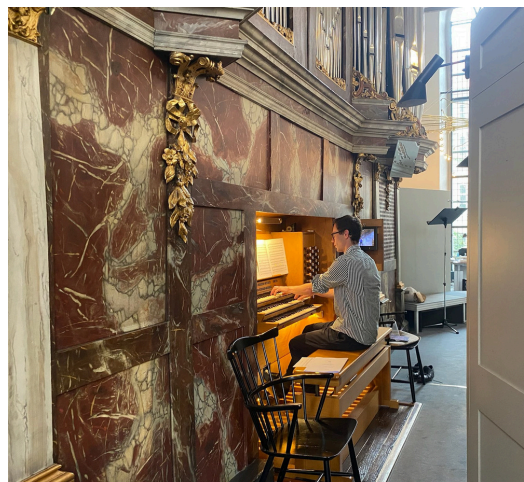
Tours are about far more than just the music. They are a chance for choristers to grow in independence and confidence, for friendships across the years groups to flourish, and for the whole Cathedral Choir community, from treble to bass, to bond over shared experience. This year's Denmark tour was a shining example of that.

As ever, we are deeply grateful to our music staff, tour organisers, parent chaperones, and supporters who made this tour possible. And to all who keep our choir singing week by week: thank you for being part of this extraordinary family.

Oliver Turner, Bass Lay Clerk and Alumni Co-ordinator

With contributions and photos from the Cathedral Choir tour blog.







Multi-Talented

In June, the Cathedral community was treated to a wonderful informal concert given by the boy choristers, who showcased a dazzling array of musical talent beyond their choral work. From trombone and saxophone to piano and cello, each boy brought their own flair to the performance. The programme ranged from familiar classics like Saint-Saëns' *'The Swan'* to contemporary pieces and even a brass duet. Perhaps most heartwarming of all was the spirit of support and encouragement they showed one another, truly a celebration of both individual skill and camaraderie of the choir

Out and About

On Trinity Sunday, our music team travelled just down the hill to Holy Trinity Church on Guildford High Street for this term's 'away Evensong'. It was a fitting occasion for such a collaboration, and with over 150 singers from both choirs, the service was nothing short of majestic. The music included Stanford's *'Evening Service in A'* and Stainer's dramatic anthem *'I saw the Lord'*, with impressive solo contributions from both church communities. Following the service, the hospitality continued with a generous reception, an uplifting example of the strength of musical fellowship across town.

Better Together

We were delighted to welcome back the Stag Consort, under the direction of Lay Clerk and Lead Chaperone Peter Hicks, who offered a beautifully sung Eucharist on Ascension Day during choir half term. Their thoughtful contribution helped mark this important festival in the Church's year.

And earlier in the term, our girl choristers hosted their annual 'Open Night' where they welcomed 13 visitors from local schools to join a rehearsal and experience a taste of life as a chorister. There was a fantastic energy throughout the evening, with the girls enthusiastically leading the way and showing just how much fun choral singing can be. We look forward to seeing which new faces may return for an audition!



Reflection from the Organist and Master of the Choristers

Katherine, our Organist and Master of the Choristers completed her eighteenth final Sunday of the the choir academic year this month, and headed off on tour to Denmark with the choir.

Katherine reflected on the last service:

It is always a moment to reflect and to share my appreciation for the whole team here. Of course, the academic year is not simply the one service, the one moment, the one 'performance' one might feel happy with - it's the growth of the team, the achievements of individuals, the resilience and effort and commitment which allow the flourishing of both the music and the community. It's the privilege of being able to serve others and the absolute joy of watching them live the music with all that they have. They give and give again. They give even more, and give even more again. they sense the moment and respect the theatre of the liturgy. That young choristers do this over and over speaks volumes of the power of Cathedral music to change lives. We must never take this for granted nor aspire to anything less than excellence in all that we do and are. This is a gift which not only keeps giving but transcends the mundane, the frenetic, the negativity, the powerless, the 'other' and gives hope to all for the future. Eighteen years of choristers have passed out of these doors during my tenure and many of my Cathedral organist colleagues have seen many more than that. How lucky we are.

*Thank you to my team for believing in yourselves.
I am so grateful*

Class of 2024-2025 - well done.

Dates for your diaries

Sunday 14 September
Cathedral Eucharist with Installation of Head and Deputy Head Boy Choristers
9.45am

Sunday 21 September
Cathedral Eucharist with Installation of Head and Deputy Head Girl Choristers
9.45am

Monday 29 September
Choral Eucharist for Michael and Angels
5.30pm

Friday 10 October
Schools Evensong Project
5.30pm
with George Abbott School

Wednesday 15 October
Choral Evensong with visiting choir
5.30pm
Shrewsbury House School

Sunday 19 October
Changed Vocies informal concert
11am
A free concert performed for you by our Changed Vocies following the 9.45am Cathedral Eucharist

Tuesday 28 October
Choral Eucharist for Simon and Jude
5.30pm

Saturday 1 November
All Saints Eucharist
7pm

Sunday 2 November
All Souls Requiem
6pm

Sunday 9 November
Requiem Mass for Remembrance
6pm

Friday 14 November
Schools Evensong Project
5.30pm
with Gordons School

Sunday 30 November
Advent Carol Service
6pm

Saturday 20 December
John Rutter Christmas Celebration
Booking now open!

Sunday 21 December
Service of Lessons and Carols
6pm

Thursday 25 December
Christmas Day Eucharist
10am
Service of Lessons and Carols
4pm



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CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION

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A FESTIVAL OF CAROLS
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brass, organ and audience.

GUILDFORD CATHEDRAL CHOIR

CONDUCTORS

**John Rutter and
Katherine Dienes Williams**

SATURDAY

20 DECEMBER

7.30pm

BOOKING OPENS SOON!

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