



# Wells Cathedral Choir Newsletter

## Michaelmas & Advent 2023



## A message from Alexander Hamilton

The days following Christmas Day and Boxing Day, but before New Year's Eve and New Year's Day, often feel to me like they're held in a state of suspended animation (who knows what day it actually is?). I think that, for Cathedral musicians, the relief of reaching the finish line of a marathon of concerts and services, in which we performed many hours' worth of festive music (singing more dings and dongs, and bings and bongs than usual...), is combined with a kind of flat feeling that it's all over. However, I enjoy the space these days give to reflect on everything that's been achieved over not only the past month, but the past year, too. I've been really fortunate to work in some extraordinary places in my career to date, but Advent and Christmas at Wells is a special thing and something I will certainly always treasure. I hope that the Choristers will hold onto these memories, too.

In the Advent Carol Service, the darkness, the music, the readings, the liturgy, and the building all came together to create an atmosphere which so powerfully embodied the Advent message. I know that for many it is the highlight of the liturgical year – the end of *Lo, he comes with clouds descending* gets me every year! Something about Advent seems to inspire composers to write such wonderful music. The Choristers and I started to learn Iain Farrington's *Nova! Nova!* back in October, and it was

an instant hit. Whilst the music itself isn't too tricky for the Choir, I knew it would take a little while to rein in the excitement of the various clicks, stamps and claps involved. It's easy to forget that in

singing for worship, we should have fun, and in doing so spread that joy to congregations and audiences. Hearing "YESSSSS!!!" from the Choristers whenever I asked them to get out their *Nova! Nova!* copies was a delight, and it reminded me that we must never lose sight of the joy of making music together in the Cathedral. The Candlelight Concerts and the many Christmas services were all wonderful occasions, and so many people have written to me to thank the Choir. Several who have been attending for decades commented that this year really stood out, and that is all down to the hard work of the Choir, and many other Cathedral and School colleagues: Clergy, Chorister Parents, form tutors, Mr Kidd, Mr Tighe and Mr Wells, Virgers, administrative staff, Cathedral Commissions, the Works Team, Chaperones, Mrs Henderson and many more! Thank you to everyone for a fantastic Christmas.

Having written two of these Newsletter messages already in 2023, after Easter and after the summer term, I'm concerned about repeating myself too much. However, it would be remiss of me not to say how indescribably proud I am of our Choristers for everything that they do. They have worked so hard this term, and are absolutely flying. It inspires me to work with them every day, and I am really looking forward to some exciting and challenging projects planned for 2024. I hope that they are all enjoying some thoroughly deserved down time.

I also offer my deep thanks to all of my colleagues for their hard work in bringing the last term together, particularly to Mary Bide, who has worked tirelessly, and always with a smile, as Acting Precentor; to Melanie Lawlor, for her unfailing precision with all things administrative; to Arnold Wills and the Chorister Trust, particularly for bringing together the fantastic weekend in October; to David Bednall, Stuart Beer, Will Drakett, Matthew Redman, Adrian Daffern, and Chris Finch for helping out as organists and directors whilst we are short-staffed; and to the Vicars Choral and their deputies for a great term of music-making.

I want to finish with a final thank you, to Juliette Coakes, our outgoing Chorister Co-ordinator. When Juliette took over as Chorister Co-ordinator in September 2022, she immediately set to work in establishing more structured pastoral care, setting up better systems for funding and administration, and led on the vital stakeholder survey completed this year. She is a person of huge intelligence, of unwavering principle, but, more importantly, of kindness and generosity. You are all aware that it's been a challenging year, in which I have tried to give everything of myself to the music of the Cathedral. However, I simply could not have done it without Juliette's support, care and friendship. I know that we will all miss Juliette very much, and on behalf of the Cathedral, I send her our love and very best wishes for the future.

I hope that you have all had a 'Wonderful Christmastime' (perhaps the 'pum pum pums' of David Bevan's marvellous arrangement for the Candlelights are still in your ears!) and I wish you a very happy, peaceful, and musical New Year.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alexander Hamilton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

## Evensong with the Girls of Bath Abbey

On Sunday 17 September we welcomed the Girl Choristers of Bath Abbey, who joined with the Vicars Choral and Girl Choristers to sing Evensong. It was lovely to have the girls of both choirs together again after they sang with the Decani Vicars Choral at Bath Abbey in May 2022. It was a lovely service with beautiful music, including Howells' *St Paul's Service* and Gibbons' *O clap your hands*.





## Royal Visit

The Senior Choristers and Vicars Choral were delighted to meet and sing for Their Royal Highnesses The Duke and Duchess of Gloucester on Monday 16 October. With rousing music by Howells (the *Gloucester Service*, of course) and Walton, Evensong provided a fitting conclusion to the Duke and Duchess' visit to Wells. They also visited the charity *Heads Up*, the Wells Almshouses, and the Bishop's Palace. We are very lucky to have HRH The Duke as Royal Patron of the Cathedral's Vicars' Close project; HRH The Duchess especially enjoyed Evensong as she is Royal Patron of the Cathedral Music Trust, with which Alexander Hamilton is also involved as a member of their Grants Panel.





# Chorister Camp-Out

On the evening of Friday 29 September, the Choristers gathered for the Chorister Camp-out in the Cathedral, an event that is proving to be something of a tradition!



As the School community closed its doors for the Exeat weekend, the Choristers pitched tents across the Cathedral transepts.



A mild evening meant games in the Camery Garden, a session of 'sing for your supper' with the Choral Scholars, dinner at Fosso Lounge, then into pyjamas for a movie before crawling into tents at midnight.

After a restful night(!), Mr Wells arrived for the early morning wake-up to ensure that everyone was ready to de-camp ahead of meeting Chorister families at The Bishop's Palace Café for breakfast. The Exeat allowed both boarding and local Choristers to meet on Saturday morning and share stories over coffee and breakfast with their families.

None of this would have been possible without Mr Hamilton and Mrs Coakes, as well as Mr and Mrs Dine for helping to set up the tents, Mr Hughes and Choral Scholars, Miss Dowse, Mr and Mrs Lichter, and Mrs Pike, who helped with activities, and Dave Francis and Lee Stevens for helping with logistics. A big thank you to you all!

The Choristers' exhaustion was worth it, as they had great fun and a wonderful Camp-out!



## Cathedral Music Trust and WCCT weekend

From Friday 6 – Sunday 8 October, Wells Cathedral was the venue for *Cathedral Music Trust* hosting their National Gathering, with members coming from all over the country to celebrate everything about Cathedral music.

The weekend began with a fundraising concert for *Wells Cathedral Chorister Trust* in Cedars Hall, in which Iestyn Davies MBE (world-renowned British countertenor, an Old Wellensian, and a Patron of *Wells Cathedral Chorister Trust*) accompanied by Joseph Middleton on piano, performed Schubert's song cycle *Die schöne Müllerin*.

After the interval, the Choristers sang Richard Rodney Bennett's *The Insect World*, with its depictions of flies, ladybirds, and glowworms – rather different to the usual repertoire! To conclude, Iestyn, along with soprano (and Wells Cathedral School vocal teacher) Elizabeth Donovan, and the Choristers sang excerpts from Benjamin Britten's opera *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. It was wonderful for the Choristers to sing alongside such Iestyn, Liz and Joe, and to sing in a different context to typical services.





Wells Cathedral Chorister Trust's annual Evensong service took place on the Saturday afternoon. Beforehand, key supporters of the Trust enjoyed afternoon tea with the Choristers in Quilter Hall.

On the Sunday, Wells Cathedral School's Chamber Orchestra joined with the Cathedral Choir for an Orchestral Eucharist service with music by Mozart, and the weekend finished with a beautifully sung Evensong with the Senior Choristers and Vicars Choral.

The weekend was hugely enjoyed by the members of the Cathedral Music Trust, a number of whom have subsequently come back to Wells, having been so impressed by the music on offer! Congratulations to the Choir for all of their hard work, and to Arnold Wills for masterfully joining up the CMT and WCCT weekends.







## Choristership medals

Congratulations to Senior Choristers, Beatrice and Thomas who, on Sunday 10 December were presented with the Elizabeth Tudway-Quilter Choristership and Iain Ball Choristership respectively.

Bea and Thomas are pictured here, proudly wearing their new medals, with Acting Director of Music, Alexander Hamilton, and the Acting Precentor, The Reverend Canon Mary Bide.

Both Beatrice and Thomas are in Year 8, and these Choristerships were awarded to them to mark and celebrate their outstanding contribution to the Cathedral Choir. The two Choristerships are named in memory of two great supporters of the Cathedral and Choir, Iain also having been Chairman of Wells Cathedral Chorister Trust for 10 years.





# A Christmas Celebration for local schools

There was a festive feeling in the air on Friday 1 December for this term's Primary Music Outreach Concert. A *Christmas Celebration* starred children from Horrington Primary School, Wells, and Norton Hill Primary School, Midsomer Norton, singing a mixed programme of classic Christmas carols and more modern festive tunes. They had been very busy rehearsing in school with Alex Jenkins, Interim Director of Primary Music Outreach, over the four weeks prior to the concert, and their hard work really paid off in a very enjoyable performance for those involved and those watching. The visiting school children were also joined by Alexander Hamilton and the Senior Choristers, who showed them a little of what they do at the Cathedral with a performance of Michael Head's *The Little Road to Bethlehem*.

## Being a Chorister for a day!



On Saturday 16 September, Wells Cathedral hosted a fabulous, free, 'behind the scenes' afternoon, during which children were able to experience the life of a Cathedral Chorister.

Thirty girls and boys aged between six and nine came from schools across Somerset and beyond for the annual Be a Chorister for a Day event where they met the Cathedral Choristers and participated in engaging and fun singing workshops.

The afternoon culminated in singing Choral Evensong in the Quire of the Cathedral with the world-renowned Choir. The children performed the anthem *Litany to the Holy Spirit* by Peter Hurford, helped the Choir lead the two hymns in the service, and learned how to process, too.

Huge thanks must go not only to the adults that helped organise and run the event, but also to the Choristers who gave up their Saturday to help the children throughout the sessions.

If you know anyone interested in registering for the September 2024 *Be a Chorister for a Day* event, please contact Melanie Lawlor via [musicoffice@wellscathedral.org.uk](mailto:musicoffice@wellscathedral.org.uk).

# Vicars Choral Commemoration Concert

Each year, the Vicars Choral arrange and perform the Vicars Choral Commemoration Concert around the time we remember Bishop Ralph of Shrewsbury (the Bishop who built Vicars' Close). It is a wonderful opportunity for the Vicars Choral to perform a varied programme of music, much of it rather different to the normal liturgical fare. This year's concert was conducted by David Bednall, composer, and Choral Director at Clifton Cathedral.

The concert included works from plainsong, to Byrd, Tallis, and Weelkes, to beautiful performances of Somerset and Cornish folksongs and a very clever medley entitled *1918* by former Vicar Choral David Bevan. Next year's concert is scheduled for Thursday 14 November – put the date in your diary now!

# Durufié Requiem for Remembrance Sunday

During a special devotional service on Remembrance Sunday, 12 November, the Cathedral Choir, joined by the Wells Cathedral School Chapel Choir and organist James Orford, sang Durufié's *Requiem*. The movements were interspersed with readings of poetry by Edwin Muir, and at the end of the service there was the familiar "poppy drop", when red poppy petals cascaded slowly down into the Nave. A retiring collection was taken in aid of the British Legion's Poppy Appeal and Wells Cathedral Music.

# Choristers chill out on festive ice skating trip

The Choristers had a fantastic time skating at Bath on Ice - their much-deserved Christmas treat!

They also celebrated Arya's brother's 1<sup>st</sup> birthday! Aryush's special day was celebrated with a huge birthday cake and hot chocolate. A fabulous time was had by all, but there was no rest for the Choristers – they returned to Wells to sing at the School's Advent Carol Service that evening.







## Congratulations to our prize-winners!

A big “well done” to the Michaelmas and Advent Plus Point winners:

### **Michaelmas**

Senior Girl: Alma  
Junior Girl: Celine  
Senior Boy: Kukhanya  
Junior Boy: George

## Advent

Senior Girl:	Bea
Junior Girl:	Emmy
Senior Boy:	Thomas
Junior Boy:	George

## Exam news

Congratulations to the following Choristers on their exam success!

Arya	Grade 3 Piano with Merit
Emilia	Grade 2 Piano with Distinction
Francesca	Grade 1 Harp
Grace	Grade 2 Oboe with Distinction and Grade 3 Singing with Distinction
Michael	ABRSM Harp with Distinction and Organ with Distinction

## Other achievements

Congratulations to Bea, who has been awarded a place on the National Children's U13 Orchestra playing oboe.

Well done, Henry, for gaining your third Belt in Karate!

Michael and his duet partner, Hannah, won second place in their age category at the *International Music Competition Singapore* for Mozart's *Rondo Alla Turca* on the piano, in this very prestigious competition. Michael has also again successfully auditioned for National Children's Orchestra (under 13s) with his *Viola Karl III*. Well done, Michael!

Zino took part in the Somerset Junior Chess Tournament in November and won the bronze medal in the U13 category. Below is a photo of Zino being awarded his medal by Ukrainian Fide Master Sasha Matlak.



Through Wells Cathedral Prep School, Grace entered and won a competition for writers aged 7-12 run by *Young Writers* - an organisation which produces an annual collection of anthologies. Grace's poem, *This is Me*, will be published in a book, *This Is Me - Where Rainbows Hide*, which will remain in the National Archives of the British Library forever! Congratulations, Grace! The publishers have very kindly agreed that we can include the poem below:



## **This Is Me**

Eyes half open. Shut. Eyes open. Shut.  
Eyes nearly open.  
Roll over onto my belly,  
Bury my face into my squidgy pillow.  
First thought: *what am I singing today?*  
Second thought: *what am I eating today?*

Crawl out of bed like a cavewoman.  
Splash my face and turn back into Grace.

I'm a girl who loves creating characters.  
And bringing them to life!  
I paint a world in my mind  
And bring them into my life.  
Since I was tiny, this has been my way  
To escape from the intimidation and  
Overwhelmingness of the  
Real world.

I have a fiery passion for music!  
Music makes me smile on the outside;  
Whilst my soul sings on the inside.  
Acting is my way of setting myself loose:  
There is a fireworks display in my heart!  
And after the final bows,  
It is replaced with a long-lasting feeling  
Of nostalgia and pride.

I come from a family of teachers, bakers,  
musicians,  
Clockmakers, jewellers, doctors and lawyers:  
So where do I fit in?

As the 'allergic child' who can't eat the cake at  
parties,  
I love to bake for people to enjoy  
(and of course, I adore a few slices too!).

I am the baby cousin on one side of the family  
And the most enthusiastic babysitter  
On the other side of the family.

My energy comes from surprising places.  
The smell and the feel of a brand-new  
Or borrowed book.  
Switching between worlds in my head:  
The storybook characters;  
Characters I have created;  
And the real-world character...  
And the 'perfect version' of the real-world  
characters.

I drift between multiple dimensions  
simultaneously  
Like a swan on a lake.

Switching it up a gear,  
Hockey makes me feel energised and alive!  
I'm part of a team. I love the feeling when we  
triumph.

Climbing makes me feel free.  
I am exhilarated whether I am climbing trees or  
walls,  
Furniture, hay bales...or my mum!

In the sea, I transform into a dolphin.  
I just bob around and feel liberated,  
I could bodysurf to the musical rhythm of the  
ocean  
For hours and hours,  
Always striving to catch that best wave  
That sends a pleasing shiver down my spine.

And back to eyes half closed. Eyes almost shut.  
Trying to calm myself to sleep,  
Thinking about the day that's passed.  
Dreaming about the fly which buzzes around a  
person;  
Getting swatted and narrowly missed.  
But the fly feels it deeply;  
And although it still looks to be hovering,  
In reality it is actually panicking,  
And closing down inside.

That's me: I'm a paradox.

## **Choir farewells**

We would like to say "thank you, goodbye, and good luck" to Vicar Choral Iain MacLeod-Jones, who left the Choir in September after 21 years, and also to Organ Scholar Jed Hughes, who had joined us in September.

In January, we shall also say a sad goodbye to Head Boy Chorister Oliver Jenkins, who has been an absolutely fantastic Chorister over his 5 years in the Choir.

They have all contributed greatly to the Cathedral Choir, for which we are very grateful. We hope they take lots of happy memories with them.

## Welcomes!

In January we will welcome a new Chorister – Gabi. We look forward to welcoming her to the Choir family.

And a belated welcome to The Reverend Canon Dr Megan Daffern, who was installed as Chancellor of Wells Cathedral on Sunday 24 September. We have also been fortunate to enjoy the musical talents of Megan's husband, The Reverend Canon Adrian Daffern, who has helped out in the organ loft since October. Both Megan and Adrian have showed great support and love for the music at Wells since they arrived, and it is wonderful to have them with us.



## Song Squad returns!

Song Squad and Song Squad Minis, our outreach choirs, are back!

We are very excited to announce Song Squad's new Interim Musical Director is Jill Edmonds, who was previously Head of Music at Wells Cathedral Prep School and works as a counsellor for children and adults, as well as leading a local adult choir.

If you know a child aged 4 to 13 who loves singing, please be in touch! For those aged 4-6 there is Wells Cathedral Song Squad Minis. This training choir for the well-established Song Squad gives younger children the opportunity to sing to a high standard and perform concerts both on their own and alongside Song Squad. For children aged 7-13 we have Wells Cathedral Song Squad.

Both choirs are great fun, open to all who attend any school, and there is no need to audition - children just need to enjoy singing! Rehearsals are held on Tuesdays from 5.00-5.40p.m. for the Minis, and from 5.00-6.15p.m. for Song Squad, during term time. For more information on either choir please contact Jill via [songsquad@wellscathedral.org.uk](mailto:songsquad@wellscathedral.org.uk).



# RSCM honour for Robin

Each year the RSCM Council confers Honorary Awards on those who have made outstanding contributions to church music.

We were very pleased to hear that Robin Walker, composer, member of Wells Cathedral congregation, former Chair of WCOS, and former Assistant Organist at All Saints, Clifton, and former Director of Music at St John's, Glastonbury, has been awarded an Honorary Membership of The Royal School of Church Music (HONRSCM)! Awarded for exceptional or very significant work that is not primarily musical or liturgical and that has contributed to the cause of church music and/or liturgy at international or national levels, Robin received this honour as he has made a significant contribution to the work of the RSCM on the Somerset Area Committee for over 25 years, initially as Chair and, since 2006, as Area Treasurer. He is also an RSCM Awards Examiner.

Robin was presented with the awards at the RSCM Celebration Day on Saturday 14 October, in Chester Cathedral. Congratulations, Robin!

## An up-date from WCCT



*Arnold Wills, Chair of Wells Cathedral Chorister Trust writes...*

The Chorister Trust is in good heart, and we are proud of our Choristers in so many ways. On Friday 6 October they performed brilliantly in a fundraising concert to a packed Cedars Hall, with Trust Patron and countertenor, Iestyn Davies. On the Saturday, 7 October, there was a magnificent WCCT Evensong, and this year the Choristers joined guests of WCCT for Tea in Quilter Hall. This was all part of the weekend attended by supporters of the *Cathedral Music Trust* ([cathedralmusictrust.org.uk](http://cathedralmusictrust.org.uk)) who were in Wells for the weekend. I've had many favourable comments about our amazing Choristers.

On 27 November the Trust organised the Annual VIP Chorister Experience, where key donors and other guests attended Evensong, followed by Carols in the Chapter House and a Reception in Vicars' Hall. The High Sheriff of Somerset, Robert Drewett, attended and spoke warmly about the work of the Trust, and his and others' admiration for the Choir and the high standards of Cathedral Music at

Wells. Others attending included Patrons, former High Sheriffs, and Ambassadors of the Trust.

### ***Coronation Fund Appeal***

The Duchess of Edinburgh GCVO, as Royal Patron of Wells Cathedral Chorister Trust, is fully in support of the *Coronation Fund Appeal*, which was launched recently. The fund aims to raise up to £500,000 by September 2025, which will be used, along with other sources, to support those who need 95-100% financial support, enabling them to take up their offered Chorister place. It's exciting and ground-breaking. Please visit our website to learn more and donate - [wcct.co.uk/coronationfund](http://wcct.co.uk/coronationfund).

The appeal is designed to accept larger donations as well as support from Trusts and Grant Making bodies whilst, on the other hand, the *Friends of WCCT* are generous regular donors who fund the on-going bursaries. If you know of any Trusts or Grant-making bodies or individuals who may be able to help with the Coronation Fund Appeal, I will be pleased to hear from them!

### ***Friends of Wells Cathedral Chorister Trust***

From September 2023, because of the regular support of the *Friends of WCCT*, in addition to means-tested bursaries the Trust has also made available for all Choristers a 6% bursary. If you are able to become part of the *Friends of WCCT* family, then please find a link to our website here - [wcct.co.uk/friends](http://wcct.co.uk/friends). It's open to grandparents too, and higher regular donors if they agree to become Ambassadors.

### ***Ceremony of Carols***

We look forward to the Ceremony of Carols in 2024, which will be on Saturday 3 February. This year we are encouraging those attending to book their tickets in advance and we hope that they will leave their generous donation online. Those with pre-booked tickets will be sure of Nave seating (unreserved). The website address is [www.wcct.co.uk/tickets](http://www.wcct.co.uk/tickets).

### ***Girls30 celebration on 15 June 2024***

On Saturday 15 June 2024 there will be a special Evensong to celebrate 30 years of Girl Choristers at Wells, and it will be a magnificent event with over 60 former Girl Choristers registered already. We're hoping that there will be many former Boy Choristers attending this special event, too. Parents, guardians, and other family are encouraged to attend. This special event is being arranged in conjunction with the Wells Cathedral Choir Association.

### ***A message for Chorister parents/guardians***

As a former Wells Chorister parent, I know how full-on Chorister life can be and I hope that your time as a Chorister parent is a fulfilling and happy one. Either during this period or afterwards, we welcome any Chorister parent volunteers who may have specific skills that might be useful to the Trust. This could be fundraising, marketing, communications/newsletter, etc. If there are willing helpers out there, please contact me. It is also not unknown for former Chorister parents to become Trustees.

### ***Details to receive information and invites***

To ensure you hear about the Girls30 and other events and news, please add your details to our database. We won't bombard you with information, but you may, if not registered, miss out on key information, especially during our *Coronation Fund Appeal*! Please visit [wcct.co.uk/update](http://wcct.co.uk/update).

May I on behalf of the Trustees wish all Choristers and their families a very happy Christmas and a healthy New Year.

Arnold Wills  
Chair of Trustees  
[chairman@wcct.co.uk](mailto:chairman@wcct.co.uk)



# Dates for your diary

Looking ahead to the Epiphany and Lent terms, here are some dates for your diary:

Tuesday 9 January	Epiphany Term begins
Friday 12 January	Epiphany Chorister Parent drinks
Sunday 14 January	Evensong commemorating Bishop Bekynton
Sunday 21 January	Epiphany Carol Service (Cathedral Choir)
Saturday 3 February	Choristers' Britten's <i>A Ceremony of Carols</i> concert in aid of WCCT
Tuesday 6 February	Bach Cantata Evensong (as part of WCS Bach Day)
Saturday 17 March	Legal Service
Sunday 24 March	Palm Sunday: Sequence of music and readings for Holy Week (Cathedral Choir)
Thursday 28 March	Eucharist of the Last Supper (Senior Choristers and Vicars Choral)
Friday 29 March	Three Hour Devotional Service (Cathedral Choir to sing for final hour)
Saturday 30 March	Easter Vigil (Senior Choristers and Vicars Choral)
Sunday 31 March	Easter Day, with Eucharist, Matins, and Evensong (Cathedral Choir)

## Monday 6 – Sunday 12 May – Sound of Wells Festival

