

CHAPEL CHOIR VISIT TO SALISBURY CATHEDRAL

31 July–4 August

The Choir's residence at Salisbury Cathedral was certainly one of the most successful and happy to date. We were accommodated at Leadenhall School, the house in the Close where John Constable used to stay, where we were made extremely welcome and comfortable by the Headmistress, Miss Tyler. The boys made good use of the large gardens, which ran down to the river, and we enjoyed the splendid food very much. It was a great advantage to be able to walk to the Cathedral without requiring transport.

After arriving on the Wednesday, we sang our first service on the Thursday, which included Noble in B minor and 'Praise to God in the Highest' by Sidney Campbell. This was well sung, but the Choir were not producing quite enough sound to appreciate the acoustic of the building. By evensong on the Friday the tone and volume of the Choir had improved along with concentration, and they gave the best performance of Tomkins' Fifth Service and Gibbons' 'Almighty and Everlasting God' so far. This service, of Tudor Church music, was a great achievement for the Choir, as it required a high degree of finish for its effect. On Saturday, we all enjoyed singing the marvellous psalms for the Third Evening, and gave a splendid performance of Wood in F, always a great favourite, followed by 'Like as the Hart' by Howells.

Sunday started with the main Eucharist at 10 am with a very large congregation, and the Choir had learned Byrd's Five-Part Mass this year with this service in mind. After an unpromising rehearsal, the service went extraordinarily well, the Choir responding to the huge number of people present, and

gave easily their finest performance of this superb Mass. The Tallis motet 'Audi, media nocte' with its contrast of plainsong and polyphony was also sung during the communion. It was pleasing to note how many people complimented the boys on their singing following this service. To give the boys a break, Matins at 11.30 am was sung mainly to plainsong by a staff choir. Evensong included Sumson in G, with its wonderful Nunc Dimittis, and the big Bairstow anthem 'Blessed City, Heavenly Salem', with a very demanding organ part played with real power by Michael Booth. The well-placed silences in this piece and its grand style brought out a fine sound from the Choir, now really making the best of the excellent acoustic, and this made for one of the really memorable performances, everybody saying what an experience it had been to sing afterwards.

The music this year did not include many solos, but I would like to pick out Ben Perch for his Bass verses in the Tomkins, and four Trebles, Thomas Huddart, Ben Bottone, James Birdseye and Stephen Norton, for their verses in the Tomkins as well as the very demanding sections in the Byrd Mass. Michael Booth thoroughly enjoyed the famous Willis organ and accompanied extremely well, following with some splendid voluntaries.

Although the attention was naturally upon the singing, the Choir showed a pedigree for the sporting life. Cricket, table tennis and motor racing were all attempted by the boys in sometimes eccentric ways. Cricket was played on an unprepared strip and, with the (tennis) ball bouncing irregularly. You could be excused for thinking yet another England batting collapse was taking place. Table tennis, however, was the main sport, with even the staff becoming involved. Rumour has it,

that when Mr Busbridge and Mrs Rees came back from the church (this year's code for pub!), Mrs Rees proceeded to take G.S.B. to the cleaners (£21.5 for the record, please note!). Many of the boys played a version of table tennis in which all could, and did, participate, called 'Round the Table'. The venue for the motor racing was the Cathedral itself, with both Andrew Done (Yamaha Cassock) and Henry Saunderson (Honda Cassock), who led the procession, trying to set lightning-fast times for walking in and out, including the afternoon when Andrew overshot the entrance to the stalls, an experience he will never be allowed to forget!

During the visit we had a tour of the Cathedral and of the roofs, which had several people looking pale and clutching on to handrails with white knuckles. However, it was a superb tour, taken by a guide who knew and loved the Cathedral. We also had a lively trip to the local swimming pool.

It was marvellous to welcome the Head Master and Dr Sandra Evans on two occasions, and to hear that we were one of the best visiting choirs that the clergy at Salisbury had heard. The thanks of all the Choir go to Mr Busbridge for arranging the whole visit, and to the other staff who helped a great deal, especially Andrew Morris with his accompanying, David Bach for an enormous amount of help, Stephen Odom for driving a minibus in addition to much more, Susan Rees and Elaine Vann for helping to look after the younger boys in particular, and Ross Hadley, Sally Odom, Richard Dawson and Fiona Busbridge for all their help. The Choir will be singing at Winchester Cathedral next year from 12–16 August.

G.S.B. and Andrew Moss

The Chapel Choir at Salisbury Cathedral

