

President's talk at Ex-Choristers' Association Reception, July 5th 2008

I am truly delighted to see so many of you here today, one year on from our inaugural meeting. Please forgive me if, when we meet, I am unable to put names of face. That skill is evading me more and more these days! And I hope to meet many of you from the post-1978 era, whose names I may never have known. May I take this opportunity to say how honoured I am to be your President and delighted that the Dean, Jeffrey John, is now our Patron. Both Pat and I are grateful that she has been made an Honorary Member.

If anything is a marker of how far the ex-Choristers' Association has come in a year, it is the publication of the ex-Choristers' Directory, available here today. I look forward to reading this with its wealth of detail about so many of you. There have been four Newsletters as well, keeping us all in touch as the Association has developed. These publications have resulted from extremely hard work by the Committee and in particular by the Chairman, Malcolm Bury. Malcolm has followed up news of ex-choristers with tremendous determination and vision, tracking down several who sang in the choir long before I came in 1958, as well as more recent ones. He has visited people to help them recall their memories (Pat and myself included); and with the Committee's help has recorded photographs of the choir, and made names and dates available online; and all with the utmost tact and skill. I do hope that an ongoing historic Cathedral Choir archive may be formed as a result of all this work. We owe the committee and Malcolm an enormous debt of gratitude.

However, this Association will flourish long-term only if you – the members – want it to, and if sufficient number of you offer some of your time and talents toward that goal. The rise of electronic communication has made it possible to be in touch with large numbers of people quickly and without great expenditure, which is an enormous help. The Abbey Music Trust believed in us enough to underwrite the formation of the Association; but now we are firmly founded rather than fledgling, so we have to take on our own responsibilities.

I believe that this Association can become really important to everybody who has served in or with the Cathedral Choir – that it will sustain or renew that sense of belonging that each of us felt as members of the Choir – and that it will help us to re-establish friendships from earlier days. I was particularly glad to be with you all today at Evensong as we mourn the death of our second Honorary Member, Carolyn Lewis-Barclay, whom so many of you knew and loved.

As Pat and I look forward to returning to Luccombe later in July for the 50th Choir Camp, I remember with much gratitude Ron Gough who died last Autumn. Ron was a mainstay of Camp for many years, particularly in those early years when I was a total novice as a camper. Those of you who met him at this gathering last year will know that by then he was much aware that his earthly span was almost run.

I would like to end on a personal note; on January 1st 1958 Pat and I, and 6-month old Heather came to St. Albans. And here we still are! Last Sunday we held a family party for our three children, their spouses and our nine grandchildren, to celebrate 50 years in St. Albans. I continue to give thanks for my great privilege in leading the Abbey Choir for 20 years and for the 30 years since, when St. Albans has continued to be our base.

This Association gives all of you the opportunity of maintaining your links with this ancient Cathedral and with the talented people of this city and its environs who continue to rejoice our hearts through music.

Peter Hurford